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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

December 2012

Vol. 117, No. 12

THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Essential Moral Virtues – II*



Duty

THE Bhagavad Gita frequently alludes to duties dependent upon birth and position in life. Birth and position in life and in society largely determine the mental and moral attitude of individuals towards the various activities of life. It is therefore our duty to do that work which will exalt and ennoble us in accordance with the ideals and activities of the society in which we are born.

It is the worker who is attached to results that grumbles about the nature of the duty which has fallen to his lot; to the unattached worker all duties are equally good, and form efficient instruments with which selfishness and sensuality may be killed, and the freedom of the soul secured.

Our duty to others means helping others; doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves. We should always try to help the world, that should be the highest motive in us; but if we consider well, we find that the world does not require our help at all. In the long run, we shall find that helping others is only helping ourselves. The only help is that we

get moral exercise. This world is neither good nor evil; each man manufactures a world for himself.

Chastity

Chastity is the first virtue in man or woman, and the man who, however he may have strayed away, cannot be brought to the right path by a gentle and loving and chaste wife is indeed very rare. Every husband must look upon all women, except his own wife, in the light of his own mother or daughter or sister.

Non-injury

Perfect morality is the all in all of complete control over mind. The man who is perfectly moral has nothing more to do; he is free. The man who is perfectly moral cannot possibly hurt anything or anybody. Non-injuring has to be attained by him who would be free. No one is more powerful than he who has attained perfect non-injuring. Nobody could be angry or fight in his presence. Even the animals, ferocious animals, would be peaceful before him.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.64-76.



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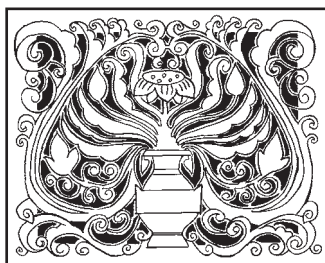


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Amrita Kalasha

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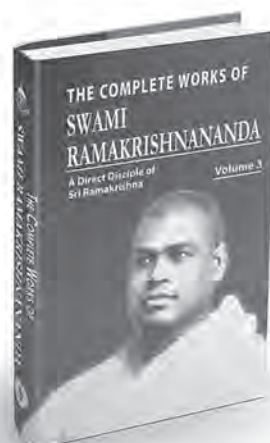
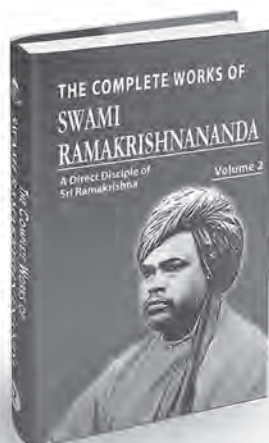
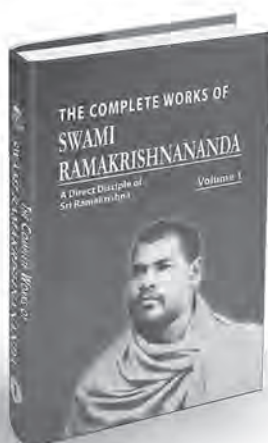
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उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*



The Frontier of Knowledge

December 2012

Vol. 117, No. 12

पुरुष एवेदं विश्वं कर्म तपो ब्रह्म परामृतम् ।
एतद्यो वेद निहितं गुहायां सोऽविद्याग्रन्थिं विकिरतीह सोम्य ॥

The Purusha alone is all this—(comprising) karma and knowledge. He who knows this supreme, immortal Brahman, existing in the heart, destroys here the knot of ignorance, O good-looking one!

(*Mundaka Upanishad*, 2.1.10)

वेदाहमेतमजरं पुराणं सर्वात्मानं सर्वगतं विभुत्वात् ।
जन्मनिरोधं प्रवदन्ति यस्य ब्रह्मवादिनो हि प्रवदन्ति नित्यम् ॥

I know this ancient One who is free from decrepitude, who is the Atman of all, and who is omnipresent by virtue of pervasiveness; regarding whom the knowers of Brahman speak of as birthless and as eternal.

(*Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.21)

तदेव निष्कलं ब्रह्म निर्विकल्पं निरञ्जनम् ।
तद्ब्रह्माहमिति ज्ञात्वा ब्रह्म संपद्यते ध्रुवम् ॥

That alone is Brahman, without component parts, without doubt, and without taint. Realizing ‘I am that Brahman’ one becomes the immutable Brahman.

(*Amritabindu Upanishad*, 8)

सर्वभूतस्थमात्मानं सर्वभूतानि चात्मनि ।
सम्पश्यन् ब्रह्म परमं याति नान्येन हेतुना ॥

Seeing the Atman in all beings, and all beings in the Atman, one attains the highest Brahman—not by any other means.

(*Kaivalya Upanishad*, 10)

THIS MONTH

Down the ages humankind has evolved, and all the changes it has experienced are leading us to the knowledge of **The Ultimate Metamorphosis**.

Sri Ramakrishna's Thorn against Thorn is a metaphor used by the Master to explain the removal of ignorance through knowledge in order to attain *vijnana*, special knowledge. Indrajit Bandopadhyaya, Assistant Professor of English, Kalyani Mahavidyalaya, Nadia, West Bengal, traces the same metaphor to several texts and scriptures.

Faith is integral to humans. Brahmachari Shantichaitanya, of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Vrindaban, affirms that real faith is **Faith in Oneself, Faith in the Atman**.

In **Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophy of Transcendence** Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty, former Head, Department of Philosophy, Presidency College, Kolkata, discusses how to transcend *avidya*, ignorance, to experience Brahman.



Dr Chandreyee Niyogi, Reader, Department of English, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, describes in **Women and Spiritual Culture** the way today's women can avoid the problem of marginalization and its many negative consequences.

No Religion is an Island is a small but relevant talk given by Reverend James D Brown,

Minister Emeritus, Market Square Presbyterian Church, Harrisburg, during the commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary at Thousand Island Park, USA, organized by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York.

Humans have been worshipping the Divine through various names, forms, and qualities. **The Evolution of the Worshipped** explains, according to Vedanta, how both the worshipper and the worshipped are ultimately one. Swami Satyamayananda is the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*.



Most of us have not understood the power of goodness in its true sense. Mohit Chakrabarti, former Professor of Education, Visva-Bharati University, Kolkata, writes on **Vivekananda and the Quest for Goodness**.

In the fourth part of **Eternal Words**, Swami Adbhutananda speaks on the guru-disciple relationship, the workings of maya, and the evil of criticism. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published by Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.

The ninth instalment of **Svarajya Siddhi: Attaining Self-dominion** by the eighteenth-century Gangadharendra Saraswati, fifteenth pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, Kanchipuram, discusses that Brahman is one and free from all types of *bhedas*, differences.

The Ultimate Metamorphosis

NO NATION, however advanced, or social philosophy, however comprehensive, can adequately deal with the complex and constantly shifting needs of its people. Today's societies have come a long way from the first settlements of the agriculturalists and pastoralists. History shows that in the last 10,000 years humans have changed society, the environment, and the world at large, and in turn these changes have affected humans.

If we observe the various social structures found in nature, we find for instance that bees' and ants' societies are much more organized than those of many higher species. Why is society so disorganized if humans have higher consciousness? Is higher consciousness responsible for disorganization? It is not so, and this needs to be studied prudently. Every phenomenon shows underlying structures. In societies some of the substructures are regimentation, division of labour, duties, material and physical needs, and environment. Just as a watch has many fine mechanisms under the dial that work in concert with others, so also do many subsystems coexist in all societies. Similar is the case regarding consciousness or awareness, which is a final product of many subconscious subsystems such as cognition, memory, perception, emotion, instinct, and so on. In the case of most well-ordered societies, its members simply cannot break the genetic laws that guide their lives. In humans there is another factor that makes us rebel against the laws of nature and that has helped us dominate the world. That factor is even stronger than nature. Nature works both

through competition and cooperation. Humans can transcend both these and become free. This requires not ordinary consciousness but its higher aspect. Though we feel bound by the body and the mind, yet a part of us feels free. This sense of freedom is central to human lives and is what actually guides us.

People foolishly run after miracles while missing the greatest miracle there is: the biological cell. Though perfectly individual, it is collective. How such a cell can clone itself into huge structures that conquer the environment is mind-boggling. With billions of different cells that make up bodies, each individual is a living miracle. The cellular division, growth, replacement, death, recycling, and all the various stupendous processes are perfectly orchestrated. One cannot but be amazed to hear that this process is mechanical, or rather biological, and not intelligent. Life in its essence is the cell. We are nothing but a bunch of cells put together. Each cell is conscious, living, and uniquely endowed with the sense of 'I'. This scientific fact is what the ancient philosophers of India taught, that the creation begins from the *mahat*, universal mind, and from it evolves *asmita*, the universal sense of 'I'. From this *asmita* rises all matter, life, senses, and so on.

At the very heart of the cell is the gene, which is selfish; but the very fact of its replication and its safeguarding itself through collective efforts also speaks of its unselfish behaviour. If it would have been totally selfish, it would have not replicated itself in the first place. The cell is individual and yet collective, and all the feelings of


altruism, love, compassion, empathy, and so on are the result of genes—selfishness, violence, fear, self-defence, and so on are also part of the genetic nature. This is instinctive in all species and all societies. What we have done is give a spiritual value to the former by making it sound religious. But this is how unselfishness, by giving rise to the idea of morality and duty, protects the species, society, life, and even the genetic code. This is part of nature, and it has worked well for a long time.

Combine these findings with Vedanta and the result is a remarkable world view. Consciousness is self-aware. Yet all the various functions of the cell, which is conscious, lie below 'our' consciousness, implying that consciousness must have different levels. If the cell were not conscious, it would not give rise to conscious self-awareness on the surface. As mentioned, all these so-called subconscious processes work together; there is really no compartmentalization between the processes. One can look at this phenomenon through the analogy of a pack of cards. Though each card is individual, it represents a particular aspect of the pack in order to play a game. Similarly, different facets of consciousness are together required to play the game of life, or express conscious self-awareness. Neurological studies, with the help of neuroimaging techniques, have shown that a conscious decision or thought can be pinned down on its subconscious operation at least 4–6 seconds before it reaches the conscious level in which a person decides to perform a particular action.

Self-consciousness is found in all species in a rudimentary form, for no society can be built without it. We have seen that the cell can answer many questions about social living, but a neuron—brain cell—has another special capacity that seems so unlike any cell that it can be seen from a separate angle. All living beings have the capacity to understand others; we can, as it were, enter into another's mind and heart. This would

not have been possible if the idea of a self or self-consciousness was limited only to the brain or to individuality. The very fact that we can go out and understand others means the self has the capacity of 'unselfishness'. It has opened up a vast world of creativity that has produced ethics, art, culture, religion, science, and philosophy. Some neurologists call the capacity of the neurons to learn and mirror others as 'mirror neurons'. These cells can transcend the strict neurological division of the self and non-self. A small quantity of these mirror neurons are discovered in the brains of humans and some primates. It also gives credence to the 'theory of mind', which says that we can understand and empathize naturally. And this has been the basis of life and evolution of society.

If the cells in all living beings are similar, we can correctly assume that all cells have grown from one primordial cell billions of years ago. And if there is consciousness in all beings, we can also assume that it has risen from one consciousness. The question is: has the first cell given rise to consciousness or has consciousness given rise to the first cell? This discussion, in some form or the other, goes on in all philosophies, religions, and sciences—one side claiming the other to be a delusion. But this dispute is ridiculous. It is this combination that makes the universe what it is. This dynamism is responsible for the whole process of evolution, of the cell, of society, of humankind. Swami Vivekananda says: 'What does the Advaitist declare? He says if there is a God, that God must be both the material and the efficient cause of the universe. Not only is He the creator, but He is also the created. He Himself is this universe.' Deep down, somewhere in the human consciousness we intuit Reality, and if this intuition is yoked to *shraddha*, faith, it will morph into the realization that Sri Ramakrishna calls *vijnana*: 'a *vijnani* sees that God has become all,' and such a one enjoys the 'bliss of God in a richer way'. ❧



Sri Ramakrishna's Thorn against Thorn

Indrajit Bandopadhyaya

Sri Ramakrishna's Thorn against Thorn

Indrajit Bandopadhyaya

SRI RAMAKRISHNA SAYS: 'Suppose a man has a thorn in the sole of his foot. He gets another thorn and takes out the first one. In other words, he removes the thorn of ajnana, ignorance, by means of the thorn of jnana, knowledge. But on attaining vijnana, he discards both thorns, ignorance and knowledge.'¹ Sri Ramakrishna uses the analogy of a thorn against thorn to teach us the appropriate way to retaliate against our lower nature and attain spirituality. He also uses a similar analogy when he says that one can counter *avidya* maya through *vidya* maya.

The state of *vijnana* is an intimate relation with God in the state of *nistraigunya*, beyond

the three *gunas*.² Sri Ramakrishna says: 'The man coming down from samadhi perceives that it is Brahman that has become the ego, the universe, and all living beings. This is known as vijnana.'³ I would like to first briefly trace the imagery of the thorn with reference to the Vedas, the Mahabharata, and some other scriptures to understand the purpose and significance of Sri Ramakrishna's thorn against thorn imagery.

Thorn Imagery in the Scriptures

A thorn is a symbol that connotes unpleasantness, sorrow, darkness, and ignorance. The rishi Kanva Ghaura addresses the gods Mitra-Varuna and Aryaman: 'Thornless, Ādityas, is the

path, easy for him who seeks the Law [*ritam*].⁴ *Ritam* is the cosmic order set in motion by God. Kurma Gritsamada prays: 'Smooth is your path, O Aryaman and Mitra; excellent is it, Varuna, and thornless. Thereon, Ādityas, send us down your blessing: grant us a shelter hard to be demolished' (2.27.6).

Sri Ramakrishna's thorn against thorn imagery or, *vidya* maya against *avidya* maya, has its seed in the 'maya against maya' found in the Rig Veda. 'Indra through his maya appears as of many forms' (6.47.18). The devas are *mayavi*, having the power of maya, and so also are the *dasyus* and asuras, who are the forces of evil. Indra, like a maya-thorn, destroys the maya-thorns called asuras: 'They laud the mighty acts of him the Mighty, the many glorious deeds performed by Indra. He in his strength, with all surpassing prowess, through wondrous arts crushed the malignant [*mayavi*] Dasyus' (3.34.6). Further: 'This great world was the net of the great mighty one; by that net of Indra do I encircle all yon men with darkness.'⁵ The word used here is *indrajala*, Indra's net, which means magic, illusion, maya. The goddess Sarasvati, who represents *vidya* maya, like Indra, is also known as the killer of the evil ones: 'Thou castest down, Sarasvati, those who scorned the Gods, the brood of every Bṛsaya skilled in magic arts [*maya*].'⁶ She, like Indra, is also called '*vṛtraghnī*, killer of Vritra' (6.61.7), and '*māyinaḥ*, possessed of maya' (6.61.3).

In the Mahabharata a thorn is used as a metaphor for hard and cruel words, for an enemy, and for *rakshasas*, demons, who are also called *kanthakas*, thorns.⁷ A thorn is also a metaphor for *danavas* and asuras. Indra embraces Skanda for killing the asura Mahisha, who has been '*devakantakah*; thorn to the gods' (3.221.73).

Thorns are also metaphors for tyrants: Hanuman tells Bhima that '*rāvane lokakantake*; Ravana

was the thorn of the worlds' (3.149.19). The gods praise the rishi Agastya for being instrumental in overthrowing the oppressor Nahusha, who has been a '*lokakantake*; thorn of the worlds' (3.101.14). The rishi Markandeya tells Yudhishthira that towards the end of the [Kali] Yuga the kshatriyas, warriors, will become the thorns of the earth possessed of *mlechha*, barbarian, nature and unleash an oppressive misrule (3.188.32). Bhishma teaches that an ideal king should learn from beings like the vulture, crane, dog, lion, crow, and snake—all of which are nefarious, inauspicious, or dangerous. The destruction or removal of such hostile enemies, which are like thorns, therefore necessitates that an ideal king should assume the nature of such beings and learn from them (12.138.60–2). This teaching suggests the thorn against thorn analogy.

A thorn is also a metaphor for the evil of curiosity, as in the case of King Saryata's daughter Sukanya, who seeing the eyes of Bhrighu's son, Chyavana, meditating in an anthill, pierced his eyes with thorns out of curiosity (3.122.12). When the sage Kalavrikshiya advises the king of Koshala, he uses the thorn as a metaphor for *danda*, punishment, to be given to evil-minded people (12.83.58–9). A thorn is also one of the characteristics of *naraka*, hell (13.24.75). Finally, a thorn is also used to signify obstacles and difficulties on the path of yoga (12.289.52).

A thorn thus symbolizes a power of something oppressive and tyrannous, either internal or external, which needs to be carefully extracted. Bhishma tells Yudhishthira: 'Every act should be done thoroughly; one should be always heedful. For, such a minute thing as a thorn, if extracted badly, leads to obstinate gangrene' (12.138.60).

We come to a very significant connection of *varna*, colour, and thorn in a Bali-Shukra narrative. Shukra says: 'The flowers of trees that are destitute of thorns are generally white in hue.

Such flowers are always acceptable to the gods, O Lord! ... Such flowers as are possessed of keen energy, as are painful to the touch, as grow on trees and plants having thorns, and as are either bloody-red or black, should be offered to [evil] spirits and unearthly beings' (13.101.27–30). This can be interpreted also as the colours of the three *gunas* according to Sankhya philosophy, which says that white is *sattva*, red is *rajas*, and black is *tamas*. Creation is an intermingling of all the three *gunas*. Another meaning of *varna* is caste, which refers to brahmana as being white, kshatriya red, and vaishya and shudra black. This analogy of colours can be extended to almost all of creation, even to the different *rasas*, moods, types of people, devas, and so on.

The *Manu Smriti* states as one of the duties of the ideal king the removal of thorns of various natures. Manu uses the word 'thorns' in the sense of various obstacles towards righteousness and social life.⁸ The *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali states: 'By conquering the current called *Udana* the Yogi does not sink in water or in swamps, he can walk on thorns etc., and can die at will.'⁹

In Kautilya's *Arthashastra* a thorn is a metaphor for exploitation, misuse of power, criminal tendencies, wickedness by foul means, calamities, and everything opposed to peace and social life that necessitates the use of punishment. Kautilya devotes a whole chapter to this topic and calls it 'Kantaka Shodhanam', the removal of thorns.

Sri Ramakrishna's Thorn Imagery

To Sri Ramakrishna, the belief in the permanence of the world and the attachment to lust and greed are thorns. These thorns are the power of *avidya* maya, which distorts the perception of Reality. Sri Ramakrishna compares the world to a 'thorny bush'—touch it and you will bleed. Paradoxically, there is a peculiar addiction even

to pain. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'It [the camel] will continue to eat thorns though its mouth bleeds. The worldly man loses his children and still clamours for more.'¹⁰ In order to survive the camel must eat briars, for this is its existential compulsion, but it does not detect the thorns, and once it has started eating, it cannot quit despite the pain and the bleeding. Such is the nature of the world. 'The world is like a thorny bush: you have hardly freed yourself from one set of thorns before you find yourself entangled in another' (96). To come out of such a world Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Light the fire of knowledge and with it set the plant ablaze' (583).

But one has to attain the state of *vijnana* by travelling through this world: 'You may reach it by going either through a thorny forest or along a good road' (352). Yudhishtira tells Sri Krishna: 'As experience can seldom be gained but by travelling in regions remote from one's home, so salvation can never be attained except by acting according to principles that are very high, compared with the ordinary level of our desire and propensities.'¹¹ In fact, the travel imagery now expands to the jiva's travel from one body to another through repeated births. The Mahabharata says: 'Like a fish that does not know anything other than water to be its element, so a deluded one foolishly falls in Prakriti's net and migrates from body to body like a fish, from one body of water to another, thinking that water is the element in which it alone can live' (12.295.22–5).

Sri Ramakrishna does not suggest the possibility of any thornless Utopia. His great message for humanity is that if thorns are an existential reality, then the possibility of removing thorns too is an existential reality—thorn against thorn. In the Khajuraho group of temples there is a sculpture depicting an apsara removing a thorn

from her foot. Such sculptures are mistakenly regarded as expressions of feminine beauty, but in this case it symbolizes the necessity of removing the pierced thorn in order to reach the sanctum sanctorum where God, the supreme Purusha, is installed.

Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘He who is aware of light is also aware of darkness. He who is aware of happiness is also aware of suffering. He who is aware of virtue is also aware of vice. He who is aware of good is also aware of evil. He who is aware of holiness is also aware of unholiness. He who is aware of “I” is also aware of “you”. What is *vijnana*? It is knowing God in a special way.’¹² In other words, both *jnana* and *ajnana* exist and one has to remove the latter with the help of the former; to attain *vijnana* one has to finally discard both.

Sri Ramakrishna extends the thorn-against-thorn *upaya*, means, to deal with indolence and *ahamkara*, the ego, the manifestations of *tamas* and *rajas* respectively. It is the nature of *tamas* to seek things without making an effort. Sri Ramakrishna says: ‘Everything depends on your effort. Your mind is your own. Give up this trifling buffoonery and go forward towards God’ (800). The *ahamkara* is difficult to eradicate, so Sri Ramakrishna teaches: ‘Since this “I” must remain, let the rascal be God’s servant’ (105). The same principle is evident when Sri Ramakrishna suggests using the inherent power of the six enemies against themselves: ‘Direct the six passions to God. The impulse of *lust* should be turned into the desire to have intercourse with Atman. Feel *angry* at those who stand in your way to God. Feel *greedy* for Him. If you must have the feeling of *I and mine*, then associate it with God. Say, for instance, “my Rama, my Krishna”. If you must have *pride*, then feel like Bibhishana, who said, “I have touched the feet of Rama with my head; I will not bow this head before anyone else”’ (220).

In short, Sri Ramakrishna is suggesting to apply *vidya* maya to overcome *avidya* maya.


In one *upaya* Sri Ramakrishna suggests burning the thorn: ‘Suppose a man is grasping the thorny branch of a plum-tree. His hand bleeds profusely; but he says, “There is nothing the matter with me; I am not hurt.” If you ask him about his wound, he will say, “It is all right; I am quite well.” Now is there any meaning in the mere utterance of these words? One must practise discipline in keeping with this idea’ (690). In psychological terms, denial is a form of defence mechanism—a form of stasis—whereas a *sadhaka* must be action-oriented, dynamic. Merely theorizing about the thorn or denying it would not help. The thorn’s power is sustained as long as one rationalizes about it by denying Reality. Sri Ramakrishna suggests the blending of *jnana* and *karma* to deal with the ‘thorny bush’ of the world. The thorn and its effect must first be honestly accepted as it is, only then can it be burnt in the fire of *jnana*. One must squarely face one’s enemies if one wants to conquer *kama* and the rest—it is the understanding of the nature of *kama* that subverts its power.

Sri Ramakrishna suggests two *upayas* against thorns. The past thorn that has already entered the flesh must be removed by another thorn, and then precaution must be taken against future thorns. He says: ‘Why should you be frightened? Hold fast to God. What if the world is like a forest of thorns? Put on shoes and walk on the thorns’ (714). Thus, both past and future thorns must be dealt with proactively. One is reminded of Bhishma’s story of the three small fishes who were friends and constant companions. One was *praptakalajna*, having much forethought, the other was *dirghadarshi*, possessed of great presence of mind, and the third was *dirghasutri*, procrastinating. One day a fisherman came to that lake and began to drain its

waters through diverse outlets to catch fish. The first fish escaped sensing danger, the second escaped after the real danger arrived, and the third was caught in the net because of its procrastination.¹³ In Sri Ramakrishna's *upaya* the one wearing the shoes is *praptakalajna*, the one removing the thorn with a thorn is *dirghadarshi*, and the last one who sits idle with a pricked thorn deceiving oneself by denial is *dirghasutri*. Wearing shoes is like touching the 'granny',¹⁴ which takes one beyond the fear of the world of thorns.

As Many Faiths so Many Paths

Through the law of association the thorn imagery is linked to an image of a path. Sri Ramakrishna's '*yato mat tato path*; as many faiths so many paths' is often taken as a message of religious pluralism. Apart from this meaning, when Sri Ramakrishna compares *mat* with *path*, it must be remembered that *mat* is dynamic like the *path*. No path to spirituality is without its twists and turns and dangers, so one must have a dynamic *mat*, which is not just opinion, belief, or faith but a philosophy of life. One who is not a traveller cannot understand this great message, for without karma there cannot be bhakti or jnana. *Yato mat tato path* can also be *yato kantaka*, as many thorns, *tato upaya*, so many means, and possibilities of removing the thorns. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna's *yato mat tato path* is not only a message for the universality of a common goal, but also a message for the universality of a common enemy—the thorn. Moreover, it is a peculiarity of human nature to become united more in insecurity than in love. The enemy needs to be destroyed and only the strong can succeed; that is why the Mahabharata says that the goddess Sarasvati is not only the goddess of *vidya*, knowledge, but also of *bala*, power: 'Sarasvati comes wherever she is invoked by the powerful.'¹⁵

Sri Ramakrishna's descent as an avatara tallies with what Sri Krishna tells Narada, that the purpose of his life is to remove the thorns of the age (12.326.82–3). Once past thorns are all neutralized and future thorns are avoided we learn that 'this world is no doubt a "framework of illusion", unreal as a dream. One feels that way when one discriminates following the process of "Not this, not this". But after the vision of God this very world becomes "a mansion of mirth"'.¹⁶ This is the state of *nistraigunya*, beyond all *gunas*—thorns—white, red, or black. This goes beyond all categories found in nature; this is *vijnana*. 

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Faith in Oneself, Faith in the Atman

Brahmachari Shantichaitanya

‘TO PREACH THE DOCTRINE of Shraddha or genuine faith is the mission of my life,’ declared Swami Vivekananda.¹ Though here Swamiji renders *shraddha* as ‘genuine faith,’ elsewhere he admits the absence of its exact equivalent in English. ‘Faith’ connotes complete trust or firm belief that never wavers or doubts. *Shraddha* is an attitude of the mind, or the spirit, which comprises faith as well as such noble traits as sincerity of purpose, humility, and reverence. It gives meaning to our lives. Faith, Acharya Shankara says, ‘is the source of stimulus for all beings for good action.’² In the present discussion faith is used in its broader sense.

Shraddha Defined

The support of an unshakable faith is an essential prerequisite for success, whether in secular or spiritual pursuits. Faith is a unique and significant faculty of the human mind. A passage in one of the Upanishads that describes the nature of the mind says: ‘Desire, resolve, doubt, faith, want of faith, steadiness, unsteadiness, shame, intelligence, and fear—all these are but the mind.’³

There are different types of faith according to the ideal towards which it is oriented. The type of faith most eulogized in Indian thought is faith in the scriptures and in God. While explaining *shraddha* Acharya Shankara considers that faith is *astikya buddhi*, faith in the verity of the scriptures.⁴ The same is implied in the question that Arjuna asks at the beginning of the seventeenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita: ‘What is the state of those who, endued with faith, adore by ignoring the injunctions of the scriptures?’⁵ This chapter,

called ‘Yoga of the Three Kinds of Faith,’ describes faith according to the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—in its various modes. In his *Vivekachudamani*, Acharya Shankara adds that besides faith in scriptural injunctions *shraddha* also is faith in the teachings of one’s guru.⁶ Since the scriptures and the words of one’s guru have but one goal, which is God, faith is more commonly understood as faith in God. ‘Strong faith in God,’ said Swami Vivekananda, ‘and the consequent eagerness to reach Him constitute Shraddha.’⁷

Whatever be the object of faith, a firm belief in it, even without any logical proof, is the *sine qua non* of faith. This leads us to a much debated issue in philosophy: faith versus reason, as a means to arrive at truth. Without going into the scholarly discussions on this issue, we may note that in our quest for truth both faith and reason play significant roles, though they do so in two different domains. Neither are they contradictory nor totally unrelated to each other. The difficulty arises when we fail to harmonize them. Even Narendranath, later Swami Vivekananda, used to scorn faith and taunt it as ‘blind faith’. Once, when he was assailing Girishchandra Ghosh with his keen arguments against blind faith, Sri Ramakrishna remarked: ‘What do you mean by “blind faith”? Faith is always blind. Has faith an “eye”? Why say “blind faith”? Either simply say “faith” or say “Jnana” [knowledge]. What do you mean by classifying faith—one kind having an eye, the other being blind?’⁸ Though Sri Ramakrishna here seems to imply that faith and knowledge are opposite to each other, that was not his real intention. He

was only pointing to the distinguishing characteristic of faith: its ability to attain certitude even without going through the tedious process of reasoning. It was not difficult for Swamiji to see the rationale behind these words of his Master. Admitting the necessity of faith he said in later years:

This idea of blind faith is objectionable, no doubt, but analysing it, we find that behind it is a very great truth. ... The mind is not to be ruffled by vain arguments, because argument will not help us to know God. It is a question of fact, and not of argument. All argument and reasoning must be based upon certain perceptions. Without these, there cannot be any argument. Reasoning is the method of comparison between certain facts which we have already perceived. If these perceived facts are not there already, there cannot be any reasoning.⁹

Self-confidence is another form of faith, discussed mostly in books on psychology and personality development such as Norman Vincent Peale's *Power of Positive Thinking*. It considers self-confidence as faith in one's mental and physical abilities. Syncretizing religious and positive psychological views Swamiji preached his doctrine of faith by placing as its foundation the Atman—the pure, eternal, self-luminous, and omnipotent spiritual principle in all beings.

Self-confidence for All

Wandering across the length and breadth of India, Swamiji gathered diverse experiences and arrived at certain important conclusions that later shaped his message. Two of his observations are relevant to our present discussion. First, he noted that religion continued to be the backbone of India's life; and second, that that backbone was no longer strong, as people had lost faith in themselves and were yielding to self-deprecation and blind imitation of alien

cultures. Later, when he went to the US and England, Swamiji observed that the people there had a great deal of faith in themselves, and this in spite of their priests harping on the sinful nature of the human being. This was truly surprising to him. Coming back to India he said in his inaugural address at Calcutta: 'Whatever of material power you see manifested by the Western races is the outcome of this Shraddha, because they believe in their muscles, and if you believe in your spirit, how much more will it work! Believe in that infinite soul, the infinite power, which, ... your books and sages preach' (3,319).

The doctrine of the Atman, which forms the bedrock of Vedanta—the religion and philosophy that has shaped Indian culture more than any other—had largely remained confined to forest retreats and the dialectics of scholars. Under the pretext of *adhikaravada*, competence, a dogma that Swamiji often decried in strong terms, the doctrine of the Atman was never taught to the common people. Swamiji not only released this doctrine from the cloisters and assemblies of scholars, but found new avenues for its application to solve individual and social problems. Besides extolling the transcendental glories of the Atman, he turned the attention of people to the Upanishadic dictum '*Atmana vindate viryam*;' through one's own Self is acquired strength.¹⁰ Swamiji said that there is infinite power and strength, generally untapped and waiting for expression, at the core of every person. When opportunities are created for this inner strength to be expressed, it can transform every aspect of a person's life.

How to bring forth this infinite strength? The first step in this direction, according to Swamiji, is to have faith in oneself, in one's real nature as the Atman. It is true that except those suffering from neurosis or other mental ailments, the rest of us do have faith in ourselves, however small or

great, for without faith life would be rendered impossible. Nevertheless, in most cases that faith is based on our physical and mental abilities and also on a variety of outside props like family, well-paid jobs, and so forth. Such faith, though commendable, is precarious and fails to manifest the real worth of a person. On the other hand, if faith in ourselves is based on the Atman, it calls out the very best within us. Swamiji assures: 'Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'¹¹

Swamiji considers faith in oneself as the basis of all other faiths. His famous warning goes like this: 'If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you' (3.190). Elsewhere he declares: 'Have faith in yourselves! If you do not exist, how can God exist, or anybody else?' (1.483). He gave a new definition of an atheist: one who has no faith in oneself.

What made Swamiji accord such a high position to faith in oneself, a position higher than faith in God? Several reasons can be adduced to account for this seeming anomaly, which may even seem blasphemous. In the first place, one's faith in God, in the guru, or in the scriptures is worthwhile only to the extent one has faith in oneself. True faith in God is not mere subscribing to a set of dogmas. It should find expression as unremitting eagerness to realize God. That means one has to zealously persevere in spiritual practices for a number of years, perhaps many lives, braving countless obstacles inevitable on the spiritual path. This is impossible if one is devoid of inner strength, which, as we have noted, comes as a result of faith in oneself.

This leads us to the importance of 'self-faith' in strengthening the moral fibre and practising self-control. In the initial stages of spiritual life the most difficult task is to gain victory over one's lower nature by leading a pure and moral life. In this struggle our greatest help is faith in ourselves, in our real nature as the ever pure, unstained Atman. Pointing out this fact Swamiji said: 'If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished' (2.301). Such faith in one's divine nature, calls out the divinity within, and then moral practices follow as a matter of course. To become moral one need not impose upon oneself a thousand conflicting rules of dubious origin. Instead, by reinforcing faith in the Atman one should only let its light illumine and transform one's thoughts and actions. If, on the other hand, one outwardly professes faith in God but fails to live up to high moral principles due to lack of inner strength, one only brings discredit to oneself.

Self-confidence and Religion

By not laying emphasis on faith in oneself, different religious traditions have often rendered people weak and dependent on external help. Expressing his disapproval over such a state of affairs in religion, Swamiji said: '[People] have made themselves helpless and dependent on others. We are so lazy, we do not want to do anything for ourselves. We want a Personal God, a saviour or a prophet to do everything for us' (8.131). Saviours and prophets never like anyone to lean on them all the time. By placing a high ideal, a noble principle before them they urge people to attain it by personal effort. They mostly help by removing obstacles. A saviour or a prophet brings out the knowledge that already is in people and makes it flash. It is deplorable that people feel

helpless without a saviour. Foreseeing such a danger Swamiji was averse to placing only a personal ideal, however great, before people for emulation.

Dependence on God is of course desirable in a devotee. But true dependence, as is well-known, is easier said than done. Before such dependence comes one must become strong by developing faith in oneself. In fact, even to pray intensely, it is said, great inner strength is required.

Another reason to note is that without strength and faith in oneself it is difficult to sustain one's faith in God. Failures, catastrophic events, and bereavements, which many times deal heavy blows to our faith in God, are inevitable in life. If people lack inner strength, their faith in God may give away. Some people under such trying circumstances pray to God to be released from afflictions. Such prayers, though not condemnable, betray, according to Swamiji, the devotee's limited conception of God, and the long path he or she is yet to traverse to approach anywhere near God. If it is true that God is benign and showers blessings, it is equally true that God has a frightful aspect that strikes terror in the hearts of all. Both good and evil owe their existence to God. A true devotee, therefore, never tries to flee from the unpleasant situations of life but accepts them as coming from God as well. Swamiji ends his famous poem 'Kali the Mother' thus: 'Who dares misery love, / And hug the form of Death, / Dance in Destruction's dance, / To him the Mother comes' (4.384). Cultivating such an attitude of acceptance towards both good and evil calls for great strength and faith in oneself.

It can be added in the present discussion that according to Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy that Swamiji preached more than any other, there is no real difference, not even distinction, between the Atman and the Paramatman. Seen in this light, Swamiji's stress on faith

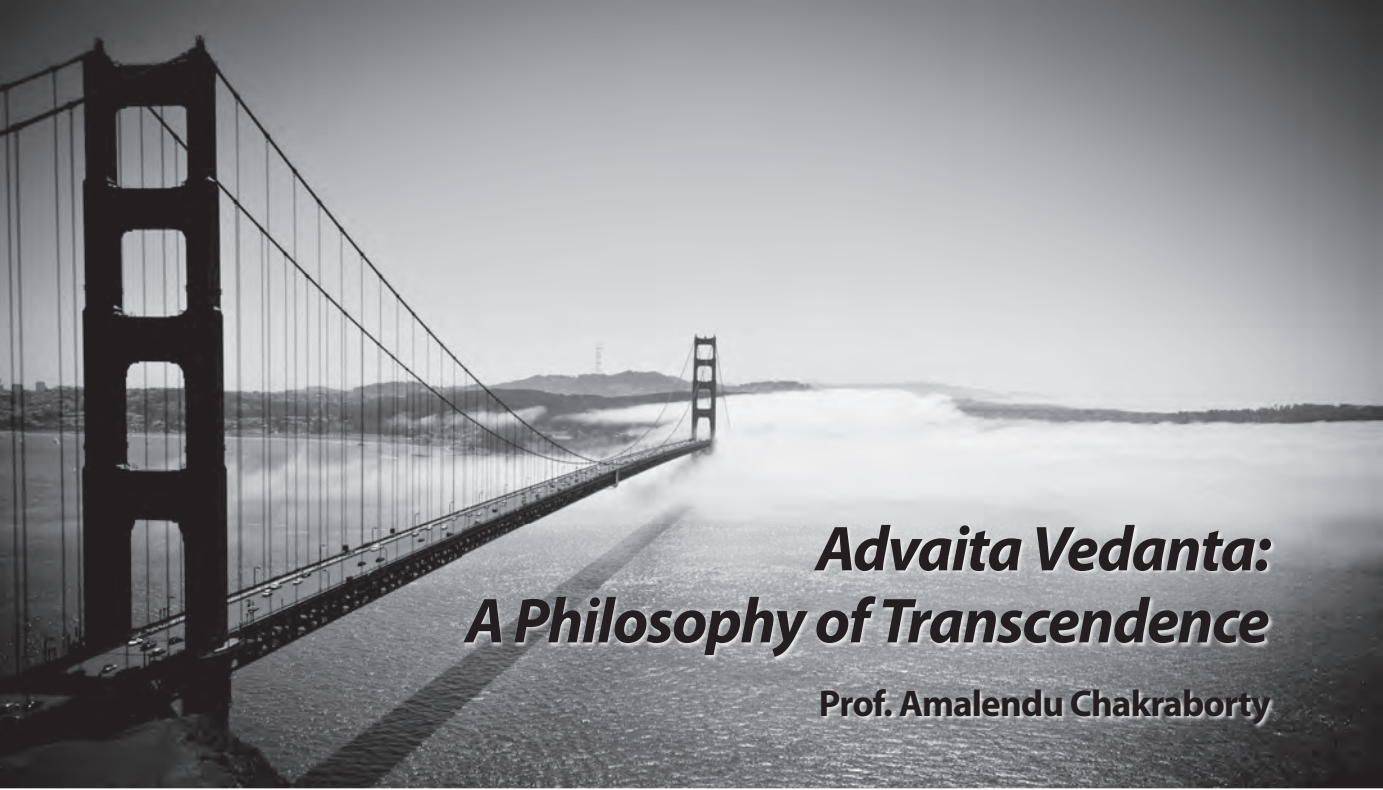
in oneself more than faith in God ceases to appear enigmatic.

But does not too much of faith in oneself make us egoistic, assertive, and even aggressive? This may be true when such faith springs from our puny ego, but not when it is based on the Atman. Swamiji assures us that faith in oneself based on the Atman 'is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all. Love for yourselves means love for all, love for animals, love for everything, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better' (2.301).

The above discussion on Swamiji's trenchant utterances on faith in oneself brings home one last vital aspect of his message. Whereas traditional Vedanta paid greater attention to the transcendental aspect of Reality, Swamiji stressed the immanent aspect of Reality. He repeatedly taught that divinity is within and the goal is to manifest it in every thought, word, and action. He preached faith in oneself as a step towards the *summum bonum* of life, which is the realization of our true nature, the Atman. ❧

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Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophy of Transcendence

Prof. Amalendu Chakraborty

ADVAITA VEDANTA is a philosophy derived from the Upanishads. Its main concern centres upon ontological and epistemological problems. Advaita Vedanta is also called *kevaladvaita*, as it asserts the existence of Brahman as the only reality and denies reality to the phenomenal world. The power through which the universe apparently becomes manifest is called *maya*, which is divine.¹ Vedanta can be considered a religion as well, because in India philosophy is not divorced from religion.

To the untutored mind the Advaita Vedanta presented by Acharya Shankara results in making people apathetic to the world and to life and its problems. He is accused of being unconcerned with the development, prosperity, and progress of humanity. But what such people generally do not realize is that in all his works the great Acharya emphasizes the Real, Brahman, and not *maya*. He is not antagonistic to progress of any kind, but shows that we are, life after life, thirsty for the water in the mirage of the world. He wants us to wake up from this

wild goose chase. The process of awakening is primarily through proper moral and unselfish living. Without going into the complexity of particular issues, I shall try to analyse the Vedantic viewpoint of transcendence.

The Nature of the World

Shankara, 'whom many Westerners as well as Indians consider to be one of the greatest philosophers, East or West',² emphasized Nirguna Brahman as the sole Reality; the absolute identity of the *jiva*, individual soul, with this Reality; and the relativity or falsity of *jagat*, the world. He not only convinced other philosophers of the rational correctness of his teachings but also gave a means of interpreting the scriptures in a consistent way.

The exact position of Shankara in regard to the world needs to be understood carefully and sympathetically. It is not Shankara's intention to state that the world is totally unreal and that it does not exist at all. The doctrine of *maya*, Swami Vivekananda says, 'is sometimes

erroneously explained as illusion, so that when the universe is said to be Maya, that also has to be explained as being illusion. The translation of the word is neither happy nor correct. Maya is not a theory; it is simply a statement of facts about the universe as it exists.³ Shankara says that the world can be looked upon as something with lesser reality, something that does not enjoy the status of absolute Reality.

To regard the world as unreal, false, illusory, or non-existent is a kind of judgement made by the mind, by reason. Words such as *sat*, existence, and *mithya*, false, are value-loaded and convey a meaning assigned to them by the mind. Their existence has a relation to the conscious mind, and their status is decided by the human intellect. These are epistemological terms, and hence when Shankara says that the world is unreal, he does not deny thereby its actual existence. What he intends to say is that the world has not eternal, universal, undeniable, uniform, contradictable, indubitable existence. Shankara does not intend to deny the very existence of the world as an empirical reality. The world as an empirical reality cannot be destroyed since it is beyond the powers of anyone to do so. Moreover, the *Brahma Sutra* teaches: '*Janmadyasya yatah*; that (is Brahman) from which (are derived) the birth etc., of this (universe).'⁴ If the world could have been annihilated, *prapanchapravilaya*, by the first person who obtained Advaitic liberation, the present universe should have been devoid of earth, sky, and so on. When Shankara interprets the world as maya and thinks of its extirpation, *pravilaya*, it is obvious that he does not mean thereby its physical destruction. What he suggests is that the experience of the world as real gets shaken, and the liberated person does not look upon the world of senses and causality as real. The world does not necessarily have an objective existence, for it is a kind of projection,

adhyasa, of the human mind outside itself, and the same world is understood and interpreted in different ways by people according to their attitudes, temperaments, and interests. The world exists not independently of the mind but in relation to consciousness, and its nature is largely determined by the human psyche. Reality, including the world, is the 'thing-in-itself', but its particular modes exist in relation to persons. Therefore, the world of experience, *prapancha*, has an anthropocentric nature, and such a world is maya according to Shankara.

Thus, this world is *asat*, unreal, because it is not eternally real and immutable. Vedanta says that the world is neither real as Brahman nor unreal as *shashashringa*, horns of a hare. As hares do not have horns but long ears, the 'horns of a hare' is a figment of human imagination, whereas the world is not such an imagination. Hence, Shankara describes the world as different from existence and non-existence, *sad-asad-vilakshana*. He says that maya is 'neither existent nor non-existent nor partaking of both characters; neither same nor different nor both; neither composed of parts nor an indivisible whole nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.'⁵

Maya is subject to unceasing change and is dependent on human experience and interest. But when one transcends one's individuality, motivated by desires and interests, and understands Existence in its pristine form, one naturally ceases to see the world's diversity and differences. It is the contention of Shankara that the world appears real in relation to and on account of limited individual interests and desires, and it is possible that it can vanish for one who can rise above them. As long as a person is motivated by the desire for acquisition, the world comes into existence for that person. When one's desires and interests end, the

world has no purpose to exist for such a one. 'Cause and effect spring into being so long as there is mental preoccupation with cause and effect. There is no origination of cause and effect when the engrossment with cause and effect becomes attenuated.'⁶ Thus, it can be said that the world is illusory because (i) it is not eternal and imperishable; (ii) it is subject to unceasing change; and (iii) it is relative to human needs, desires, and interests.

This Vedantic viewpoint can be understood more clearly if we take the analogy of the dream state. Shankara uses the word *iva*, like, or just as, when he says that the whole manifestation of names and forms, superimposed by ignorance, vanishes away like things seen in a dream on waking up. Therefore, Vedanta says that the objective world of trees, rocks, and bodies vanish for someone in whom the knowledge of Brahman dawns and remains as it is for the rest, who are in ignorance. As the dream merges in the dreamer, so does the universe, which sprang from Brahman, merge in Brahman. The world does not merge into nothingness. 'He (Aruni) said (to his son Shvetaketu): "O good looking one, by what logic can Existence verily come out of non-existence? But surely, O good looking one, in the beginning all this was Existence, One only, without a second."⁷

Reality Affirmed

As most of the aspirants go through a gradual process of realizing Brahman, Advaita Vedanta teaches that the reality of the world of objects is dependent on one's level of experience. There is a ladder of experiences from the lower to the higher levels. It is natural that objects on the lower level of experience go on diminishing in their value and importance. On a higher level of experience one can naturally feel no interest in objects, which exist on the lower level, and

thus one may feel that they have no importance and value. The experiences on the lower levels get subordinated to those on the higher level of consciousness, and hence their value or reality goes on diminishing. The concept of illusoriness is thus clarified, and it becomes a matter of experience for those who evaluate the phenomena from their respective points of view. Swamiji teaches the same thing in a remarkable way:

Suppose there is a screen hiding you from me, in which there is a small hole through which I can see some of the faces before me, just a few faces. Now suppose the hole begins to grow larger and larger, and as it does so, more and more of the scene before me reveals itself and when at last the whole screen has disappeared, I stand face to face with you all. You did not change at all in this case; it was the hole that was evolving, and you were gradually manifesting yourself. So it is with the Spirit. No perfection is going to be attained. You are already free and perfect.⁸

The Vedantic concept of *panchakoshas*, five sheaths, substantiates this interpretation. The ascending gradation of *anna*, food; *prana*, life-force; *manas*, mind; *vijnana*, intelligence; and *ananda*, bliss, reveals the fact that those who care more for *prana*, give less importance to *anna*; those who give more importance to *manas*, give less importance to *prana*. The lower levels, however, cannot be altogether eliminated. This is a phenomenon of valuation and involves a kind of transcendence. Transcendence exists in a progressive upward ascent from the self towards the experience of absolute Existence. Absolute Reality or Brahman can be said to be the 'thing-in-itself' or 'being-in-itself' devoid of any specific characteristics or properties. Hence, there is some meaning in saying that the Absolute is *nirvishesha*, without forms and properties, as it transcends every determination

and limitation in order to maintain its comprehensiveness—the Absolute is also described as encompassing.

It is argued by Shankara that something can be said to be unreal only when one has at least a vague awareness of something else that is real. If there is nothing real, there cannot be perception of the unreal as well. Negation presupposes an affirmation. The well-known illustration used by Vedanta is that of a rope seen as a snake in semi-darkness. When we see the snake the rope vanishes, and when we see the rope the snake disappears. Yet, the illusory snake apparently rests on the real rope. We negate the snake, the universe, and affirm the rope, Brahman, for without the reality of the rope the unreal snake does not appear. The existence of the absolute Being cannot be negated, as it has been repeatedly experienced by sages and saints.

Revelation in Vedanta does not have the same implication as in Abrahamic or other religions. ‘Revelation, therefore, is by no means God’s word—because, paradoxically, if it were to derive from a divine person, its credibility would be impugned. ... Then where does it come from? And answer is stark and simple: it is given with the world.’⁹ Hindu thought says that ‘the universe goes through a pulsating rhythm of origination, existence, and dissolution, it is also held that at the dawn of a new world the revelation reappears to the vision of the seers, who once more begin the transmission’ (ibid.), of the knowledge of Brahman. These experiences become, to many, the logical presupposition that remains not only at the level of conceptual thinking but also becomes finally a matter of living experience.

Vedanta teaches that distinctions and differences have their origin in words and speech. ‘As by knowing a lump of earth, all things made of earth become known; all transformation has

When the Supreme Being is thought of as inactive—not creating, sustaining, or destroying—I call Him Brahman or Purusha, the Impersonal God. When I think of Him as active—creating, sustaining, and destroying—I call Him Shakti or Maya or Prakriti or the Personal God. But really the distinction between Brahman and Shakti—or Impersonal God and Personal God—is a distinction without a difference. The Impersonal and the Personal are one and the same Being even as milk and its whiteness. You cannot conceive the milk without the whiteness. They are one like a gem and its lustre. They are one like a snake and its zigzag motion also. Similar is the relation between Brahman and the Divine Mother.

—Sri Ramakrishna,
in Swami Nikhilananda, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 169

speech as its basis, and it is name only. Earth as such is the reality.’¹⁰ Vedanta does recognize the function and use of language and words, but it maintains that the highest Reality transcends all words and language that seek to describe it. Brahman is, therefore, beyond description and characterization. This Reality is thus described as *nishprapancha brahma*, which is the source and ground of all limited existence: ‘The enlightened person is not afraid of anything after realizing the bliss of Brahman, failing to reach which, words turn back with the mind.’¹¹

Significance of Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta as systematized and preached by Shankara holds an optimistic and positive attitude towards life. It emphasizes the significance of transcendence by a sufficiently qualified person who struggles not to be engulfed in and delimited by any worldly situation, however fine and charming it may appear. It throws open a

unique path of infinite possibilities by taking us from wherever we stand in our spiritual development. It encourages us to search and experience higher and higher truths. That is why Vedanta is not limited to a particular people, race, or religion; it is broad as the sky and deep as the ocean. One's progress towards higher levels of consciousness ends only when one reaches the absolute Brahman and becomes one with infinity. This is the ultimate goal, this is perfection. It may be inconceivable to many, but the experience of being one with Brahman shatters all delusions of duality. By advocating the ideal of realizing Brahman, Vedanta throws open to humanity the highest possible morality, renunciation, and discipline, which precede this supreme experience. For a living person there is no higher experience than this; whoever attains it is called a *jivanmukta*, free while living. Vedanta also opens unlimited possibilities through which humans can build institutions and societies based on Vedantic principles, ideals, aspirations, and sadhana. Such structures are of lasting value and help all people to access their inner infinite powers, to become aware of their hidden dimension of perfection by transcending their present limited views of the world. A new respect for everybody, without distinctions, dawns on people with Vedantic experience; they have the power to transform human interactions and bring greater peace in the world.

Brahman is transcendental as well as immanent, as it is the cause of all modes of existence, visible and invisible. Being all-pervading it is all-comprehensive and of the nature of Satchidananda—absolute Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss. The steps to the realization of Brahman can be understood as a continuous process of mental 'de-conditioning' in order to be able to experience vastness and infinitude. Swamiji speaks of this process as 'de-hypnotization'.

Transcending every actual and possible stage of existence and experience naturally becomes a kind of ceaseless de-conditioning of the mind. The more one transcends the previous steps, the more joy one obtains. Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

Go forward. A wood-cutter once entered a forest to gather wood. A brahmachari said to him, 'Go forward.' He obeyed the injunction and discovered some sandal-wood trees. After a few days he reflected: 'The holy man asked me to go forward. He didn't tell me to stop here.' So he went forward and found a silver-mine. After a few days he went still farther and discovered a gold-mine. And next, mines of diamonds and precious stones. With these he became immensely rich.¹²

The inner attitude of a sadhaka is not to remain content with any particular and limited experience of consciousness but to finally embrace the entire Existence in all its configurations. It is through transcending the limited that humans can live an authentic life of existence, consciousness, and bliss.



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Women and Spiritual Culture

Dr Chandreyee Niyogi

IN THE NOVEL *Treasure Island* the ex-pirate Ben Gunn, who has been marooned on an island for several years, assures the hero that he had a pious mother like all boys who grow up to be gentlemen, although it probably did not look like he did. As a child he was religious: 'I was a civil, pious boy, and could rattle off my catechism that fast, as you couldn't tell one word from another.'¹

Sometimes, like Ben Gunn, we may also learn our scriptures and moral lessons quite well, but they do not make much sense to us in our personal lives. Merely learning the codes of civility and piety does not help us be good; we need to attend to our inner nature as well. Spirituality can do this as it helps us change ourselves; it can also heal the wounds received from others. Whether we are believers or non-believers, ultimately it is we who know what is lacking in our inner nature and how it can be fulfilled. We also know how to bring out the best in us. It is only with the awakening of our inner spirit that we can feel the outer world responding favourably to us.

Marginalization

In the *Manu Smriti*, as well as in many religious texts of the world, we find perplexing contradictions about the conduct prescribed for women, which modern feminists have so often commented upon. We do not realize that the *Manu Smriti* was written around the first century BCE and had a tremendous civilizing influence on the Indian mind. Instead of basing society on the force of arms and wealth, as instruments of domination, Manu made morality and spirituality the

basis of society and civilization. Today, though living in a progressive society, we are still stuck with many unspiritual values. We clamour for freedom, but in most cases that freedom is just selfishness. Instead of blaming others we should create ideal conditions and values for our growth and for society.

In different periods of history saints and sages have come and adapted universal ideals and values according to the requirements of the age. People have listened to these voices, and society has oriented itself accordingly. Indian heroes and heroines were above all spiritual people, despite their social, political, military, or other status. Paradoxically, in today's society the home, which should be the ideal place for cultivating values, is often the hotbed of indolence, quarrels, and pettiness. It is at home where we must develop character, spirituality, and unselfishness.

I do not want to engage in any speculation about who is right and who is wrong in contributing to the marginalization of women, but what is sure is that in a world dominated by male values and a culture of masculinity the word 'woman' carries, in many cultures, a negative connotation. It is also true that often times the marginality of women is due to women themselves, even educated ones. Then there are many women who do not assume that marginality is a sign of inferiority. As a woman I can vouch for the fact that all women do not want to run into the public and prove themselves equal to men by competing for the highest posts and positions. There are also many men, children, and destitute people who do not pursue

the need to express themselves the way society wants them to do. Yet, it would be a mistake to consider that these people have nothing worthwhile to contribute to the world. Whoever wants to fulfil her or his life quietly at home, away from the public gaze, silently contributing to the happiness of others by developing values and spirituality, cannot be called marginal. The term itself is relative, because it is found that in the majority of the cases those who are at centre stage in a particular field find themselves marginalized in other fields.

All people, marginalized or not, have an inner need for happiness and recognition. True spirituality, I think, assures that each one is unique, wonderful, and precious. If this assurance is removed from a person, she or he is bound to face stress, anxiety, loneliness, and uselessness. In the course of all these years I have learned that knowledge wells up from deep within, from the

human soul. Even the most cerebral people may be prone to distress and fragmentation if they are unable to access this wellspring of life; they become marginalized from their real source! Such people need to return from their marginalized zones to spirituality, which is the core of all human values.

Women are often torn inside by a bitter sense of injustice for what they see around. When I dare to express an opinion as a woman, in disagreement with the men in my family, I may dread being misunderstood or provoke an angry retort. I may also dread an unnecessary conflict with others whose morality is not the same as mine. This may spark discord, or even violence, which I would have to pay for with the meagre happiness that has been given to me in life. This is the thought that keeps most women silent about what they feel to be wrong and prevents them from actively protesting against it. A



woman's sense of injustice is not so much a question of making others pay for their deeds, it is an inner thirst for a kind of life and well-being that is not oppressed by injustice or violence. In fact, women often feel like passive victims of circumstances that they cannot change by themselves. Many a time women, in their desperation, are forced to understand that there are higher values than justice they need to be aware of. Spirituality, as I understand it, can help a woman overcome these feelings of fear and helplessness from the inside and transform them in a sense of fulfilment and security.

Innate Spirituality

There are women who have been seen as iconic emblems of Indian womanhood; for example, Sita, Radha, and Sri Sarada Devi. And we see a great deal of marginalization in their lives too. Their marginalization, however, has made the narratives of their lives even more prominent. Sita had to suffer the marginalization of living in the forest for fourteen years, though with her husband, to later be abducted by Ravana. The armies of Rama freed her, but she was marginalized again when the citizens of Ayodhya demanded her removal. She spent the rest of her life not as a queen but as a hermit in Valmiki's ashrama. Radha also was marginalized by her husband and others because of her divine love for Sri Krishna, who in turn finally abandoned her to become king. The Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was marginalized and closeted for many years in the cramped Nahabhat of Dakshineswar as well as in her nondescript village of Jayrambati. Many people were not aware of her presence, though she lived near them. All these 'marginalized' women, to my vision, did suffer dishonour and injustice; but look at how each one of them is worshipped today! And this worship will continue as long as humankind exists.

They had to spend many years of their lives alone, but they developed a tremendous spirituality that was never shaken. Swami Vivekananda says: 'Out of purity and silence comes the word of power.'² The lives of abstinence of Sita, Radha, and Holy Mother, together with their ideal of spirituality, are the cause of victory not only for them but for the whole world.

We cannot ask today's women to be like them—they will not, rather they cannot—but they can learn from these iconic women the ideal of spirituality and goodness. We do not know if their loved ones asked them to reserve their blessings only for good people, but we know that Sri Sarada Devi had staunchly refused exclusivity by being a mother to all those who called her 'mother', whether they were good or bad. Holy Mother says: 'Nobody is a stranger, my dear; the world is yours.'³

Holy Mother's words are perhaps the words that come from any true woman's heart. A woman does not marginalize anyone, nor can she remain marginalized. Today's woman has to find her place in the mighty scheme of existence. This age seems to be the most propitious time for this to happen. Merely learning the codes of civility, fighting for petty rights, and reciting the catechism does not confer the freedom women badly need. It is by developing spirituality and making it a part of family life and social culture that women can become free and at the centre of everything.



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No Religion Is an Island

Reverend James D Brown

MANY YEARS AGO a blizzard in Santa Fe brought the world to a standstill. It was Sunday, and I walked a mile through drifting snow to get to church. About two dozen hardy souls who had struggled through the drifts greeted me in the sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church. I had prepared what I thought was a solid three-point sermon and decided to proceed as usual, preaching about twenty minutes. Afterward a wise old Texan took me aside and said: 'When a blizzard buried our ranch and we went out to feed the cattle and only a few made it to the trough, we didn't dump the whole load.'

It was a lesson learned about context and timing and expectations. Today I have a wagon load of thoughts about the significance of this very special interfaith service honouring the one hundred and fiftieth birthday of Swami Vivekananda. You will not get the whole load, I promise. I have but one point to make, inspired by the prophetic witness of Swami Vivekananda and well put by a wise teacher from a later generation, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Here is what he said: 'No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Today religious isolationism is a myth.'¹

This sounds so simple. But this truth, like all great truths, has dawned slowly in the consciousness of the human family. It is far easier to cling to our own religious experience as the only valid way to encounter God.

In the fits and starts of our expanding awareness that no religion is an island, Swami Vivekananda stands out as a prophet for all seasons. He was way ahead of the curve in the US when he arrived at the World's Parliament of Religions,

which was held for two weeks in Chicago in September of 1893. The gathering turned out to be more an ecumenical gathering of Christian denominations than a true parliament of world religions. There was one Muslim present and a handful of leaders from the other great religions of the world. I am sorry to say that the Presbyterian Church at its General Assembly in 1892 had expressed disapproval of having any religions but Christianity represented, echoing the feelings of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who refused to come claiming 'the Christian religion is the one religion'.

It is surmised that the number of Hindus in America in 1893 could have been counted on one hand. Into this not entirely hospitable environment in Chicago came Swami Vivekananda, very young and very charismatic, to lay claim to what for most Westerners was a brand new way of viewing the religions of the world. One of the major themes in his address to the Parliament was that the light of ultimate Reality comes in different colours. His language is vivid: 'In the heart of everything the same truth reigns; the Lord has declared to the Hindu in his incarnation as Krishna, "I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know ye that I am there."²

Swami Vivekananda is clear. No longer can religion be seen as an island. We have to come to know a greater God than the one who is confined to a single religion. With Swami Vivekananda leading the way, the Western world entered the age of pluralism.

I want to say a word about the essence of pluralism as I understand it: Thousand Island Park, originally a Mecca for Methodists, became something of an early outpost for experiencing pluralism due to the fortuitous, even miraculous, arrival of Swami Vivekananda on these shores in the summer of 1895. As I think about pluralism, I am aware that there lingers in our consciousness the troubling thought that the pluralism espoused by Swami Vivekananda may be no more than relativism—if your faith and my faith are of equal worth, then it may not really matter which path we take. I, for one, do not believe this was the nature of the discourse here in Thousand Island Park in Mary Elizabeth Dutcher's cottage during the summer of 1895, and in the years that followed. Let me explain how I see genuine pluralism. Abraham Joshua Heschel once said that the most important prerequisite of interfaith dialogue is faith. By this he means that when I make my way up to the Vivekananda Cottage to talk with Swami Yuktatmananda it is an opportunity for me to share my faith and learn more of his—to converse as friends along life's way, sharing the deepest intimacies of our hearts and minds and wills. When I say, for example, that I have seen the love of God shining on the face of Christ, I then wait expectantly for the swamis in my life to tell their stories of similar saving grace.

Rabbi Heschel speaks truth to me when he says that our task in a pluralistic world is to remain loyal to our own traditions while showing reverence for the religious paths of our friends. I love what he says about friends sharing their faith stories with each other. We meet as human beings who have so much in common, a heart, a face, a voice, the presence of a soul, fears, hope, the ability to trust, a capacity for compassion and understanding, the kinship of being human.

I thank God for the pluralism, rightly understood, rooted in the history of Thousand Island

Park, and the significant contribution of Swami Vivekananda and all the saints who have followed in his footsteps to this holy place. No religion is an island, nor is any human being. This is a rare opportunity to mull and ponder those fleeting moments in our lives when we come face to face with absolute Reality, with the ground of our Being. This is a day to relish our glimpses along life's way of extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity—moments when we know in our hearts that God is real.

I will close with a poem by Wendell Berry, which for me captures the essence of what all religions seek to impart in seekers like you and me. Listen to what he says about 'The Peace of Wild Things':

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and
my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
Who do not tax their lives with forethought
Of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
Waiting with their new light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.³

May all our paths lead to such grace-filled freedom.



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The Evolution of the Worshipped

Swami Satyamayananda

The great mistake is in recognising the evolution of the worshippers, while we do not acknowledge the evolution of the Worshipped.¹

SINCE HOMO SAPIENS first evolved from hominids about 150,000 years ago, social living and rudimentary beliefs that one may label religious have significantly shaped human development. As the species developed, these beliefs tried to coherently make sense of the vast world and human destiny. Thus humankind progressed through various levels of 'religious' beliefs and social systems in its long journey to present day society.

The Centre of Social Life

Swami Vivekananda says: 'Of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destinies of the human race, none, certainly, is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call religion' (2.57). There is plenty of evidence that what are called religious beliefs started long before humans learnt to live in large communities. These beliefs were prevalent in people who lived as hunter-gatherers and they contributed to creating a larger dimension to their feelings of kinship with others. In every culture and tribe in the world one sees religious ideas, ranging from the complex to the simple, being developed independently. Some tribes may have learnt it from other tribes, but this learning was more of an embellishment and a refinement than something new. As the last ice



age ended some 11,500 years ago and the warm climate was changing the world, humans were busy adapting to this new environment. Some small nomadic bands of hunter-gatherers discovered, learnt, experimented, and crossed certain grasses to develop agriculture and also domesticated animals. All these changes made them settle down to a very different way of life. New codes of morality and duties came into being, along with simple division of labour. Apart from learning to measure, count, weigh, and store things, they also learnt to harmonize their social activities according to the changing seasons. As society grew, so did ethical ideas, because living together meant restraint and forbearance. All these social activities centred round their religious beliefs, which were also changing constantly with their lifestyles.

Humans were habituated, in their long history, to scan the heavens while sitting around a fire. This regular attention enabled them to see patterns in the skies. Living amidst nature and overwhelmed by it, humans naturally felt a deep



connection with it. The first development of religion was fetishism, which is the worship of inanimate objects thinking they have supernatural powers. The skies and the earth and the oceans were alive to their perception; they were given human attributes. Different natural phenomena were personified into gods and demi-gods, for humans believed in a power that organized and animated the universe. This second stage is called animism. It is a belief that attributes life to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena. Animism led to shamanism—shamans were people considered to have access to the world of spirits, who entered into a trance during rituals, and practised divination and healing. Theism, the belief in the existence of a god or gods intervening in matters of the world and having a personal relation with all living beings, took many forms, one of which was henotheism—adherence to one particular god out of several, especially by a family or a tribe. The other form of theism was pantheism, which identifies god with the universe, or regards the universe as her

or his manifestation. Out of the belief in several gods and goddesses came the idea of one single God, and this was called monotheism. Monotheism had two aspects: Personal God with qualities and Impersonal God with qualities. Finally, monotheism, especially in India, transcended its lower forms and evolved into monism, or absolutism, which denied all duality—between soul and God, mind and matter—as unreal. Theistic development was not uniform in different cultures, and most religions believe in monotheism. In many other cultures all the preceding steps to the present dominant belief were destroyed as wrong, which is fanatical and improper. In Hinduism one discovers that all the preceding steps of religious beliefs have been retained, giving us an insight as to how beliefs evolved.

Death puzzled and frightened those early humans. They had already developed rituals for the dead and honoured their memory. Life was mysterious and so was disease and ill-health, but death was terrifying. Where did the dead go? Did she or he remain in some form? 'This

doubt that arose as a consequence of the death of a man—some saying, “it exists” and others saying “it does not exist”.² The mystery of death was also one of the starting points of building a religion around it. This is the origin of ancestor-worship found in different cultures. Various *lokas*, planes, and paths to them became part of the mythic lore. A god of death carried them to the *loka* of the ancestors. The early humans had discovered that nature’s many forces have a deity guiding them and that those deities were powerful and immortal. Then came the big leap in belief that connected the deities with the human soul. This relationship either took the concept of the soul being a part of the deities or it being an offspring of the deities. Just as humans have dwellings, so do the deities. These dwellings became the goal to be attained after death, because people believed it was their natural inheritance. Later conditions were applied: one should not annoy the deity or deities through bad conduct, which brought the idea of prayers and propitiatory rites. All these beliefs and practices became part of human lives. Thus the rudimentary ideas about soul became better.

How or why do humans naturally believe in God? The answer is simple: It is because of our unique self-consciousness, which can project itself outside and try to understand the world. In India, as well as in most of the world’s religions, religion is an experience. Certain supersensuous truths were experienced first, and later these became a belief system. The original experience was encased in a body of theology, rituals, and mythology in order to protect and transmit it down through generations. It is obvious that the majority cannot have the original founder’s experience, so they busy themselves with the externals of the religion. External forms act like the husk to protect the grain inside. Most people do not want the grain but only the husk.

In time religious dogma end up becoming both the grain and the husk. As rituals, theology, and mythology gain significance in a particular cultural milieu, these dogmas align themselves with that culture.

Religious beliefs arising in a particular culture became so powerful that people fought and died for them. They naturally built huge temples and created rituals to honour their gods. Old agricultural festivals and rites became religious, and almost every social activity was absorbed into religion. Gradually, all social institutions and customs came to be religious institutions and customs. Social divisions, wars, trade, agriculture, birth, death, and marriages soon became religious duties.

Social and Mental Development

Living in a society helped humans survive many challenges and disasters and even dominate the environment. Whatever has life in some form is social. No being can live alone and survive for long; isolation and loneliness is a path to physical and mental stunting. Every species on earth has survived because of its ability to live in groups. Besides being enabled for the obvious purpose of development of progeny, each body and mind is designed by nature to interact with the environment and with other beings. Social living is not only about physical and mental development but it is also about how nature and evolution works. As the interactions became dynamic and constantly improved, morality, duties, and knowledge evolved. And as society progressed, some of the old religious beliefs were discarded or higher ideas about them were developed. Humans began evolving higher ideas about themselves, the world, and their gods. Swamiji says: ‘The idea of the cruel and ruthless Jehovah in the Old Testament has frightened many—but why? What right have they to

assume that the Jehovah of the ancient Jews must represent the conventional idea of the God of the present day? And at the same time, we must not forget that there will come men after us who will laugh at our ideas of religion and God in the same way that we laugh at those of the ancients.’³

The early humans lived near their fields and rivers and looked at natural phenomena with fear and veneration. It is very obvious that humanity today has evolved, and though still awe-struck with the universe, humans have learnt to discover, chart, travel, send space probes into it and even know the elements it is made up of. Could bronze-age humans ever believe they could travel to the moon? Today, their descendants can do that. We have found each galaxy to contain billions of stars, and what were considered stars are galaxies and are estimated to be around a hundred billion. It is obvious that what has caused this expansion of knowledge is the expansion of the mind.

The expansion of knowledge has enabled us to understand all forms of elements and matter and peer into its heart, the atom, and even to go deeper into it and peer at its components, to finally find the basis of all matter—energy. By showing the unity of matter and energy, and space and time, humankind has made a tremendous intellectual leap. Humans have also used their minds to peer into the foundation of life itself and into its heart, the DNA. It has discovered the astonishing fact that all life, in its billions of forms, has evolved from one original cell. That cell had the capability to divide and replicate itself, and today it has colonized the world in every nook and cranny. When it has to survive and dominate a particular environment it intelligently builds different bodies made up of cells. All these life forms are but different cells whose evolution process took a long time, through billions of years.

The old religious beliefs about the origins of life and creation are puerile. For a long time religion had acquired the authority to answer all questions about the heavens and the worlds under them; these answers are no longer relevant. There was a time when the old religions fought these modern developments, but they fought a losing battle, for progress and evolution cannot be stopped by such obstructions. The book of life is not any sacred book any longer, for the truths that humankind discovers is in the very fabric of our bodies, minds, and the environment. The correct explanation of a thing has to come from the nature of that thing itself, and explanations that seek causes through external agencies are incorrect. Swamiji says: ‘To this idea the discoveries of modern science are tending every day, and the latest theory that has been accepted on all sides is the theory of evolution, the principle of which is that the effect is but the cause in another form. ... The theory of creation out of nothing would be laughed at by modern scientists’ (2.331).

If religion is pervasive and natural, why do so many people profess atheism? Atheism has almost become a religion; but atheism has a widespread following not due to the fault of people but due to static and fossilized religious dogmas that have thwarted many attempts at reformation. Today some of these religious forces, social institutions, and religious beliefs have not kept pace with social and cerebral development and our understanding of nature. They are now more of a hindrance to modern human development. While all fields of human endeavour have progressed, certain religious beliefs have not. This is the time that old religious beliefs should come out of their crystallization to integrate the knowledge of the macrocosmic and the microscopic worlds along with their origins. Religion will also have to integrate our heightened social and moral ethics and also the vastly different human

aspirations and goals. Only then will religion become more relevant and continue its old powerful role to drive humankind to greater perfection.

Do we go about destroying the old beliefs? Swamiji says: 'Religion has been reduced to a sort of national form. It is one of our very best social remnants; let it remain. But the real necessity which the grandfather of the modern man felt for it is gone; he no longer finds it satisfactory to his reason' (2.331). Were the religious beliefs that helped humankind during hundreds of thousands of years in its long journey, in its hour of distress, helplessness, misery, and grief, all wrong? Did not humankind find strength in those beliefs in order to face the morrow and innumerable trials and tribulations? These beliefs helped it survive so that we could walk on earth. We need not laugh at ancient human beliefs because their world and society and their knowledge was limited, not wrong. That humans might and do err sometime does not mean that they will err for long, as it is against their very nature. That is why all the previous stages of fetishism, animism, pantheism, and so on are not wrong but different stops on the right road. Besides, the language they used was mystical, hazy, and mythological, while modern language is precise, systematic, scientific, and mathematical. Swamiji says: 'From the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite' (1.17).

There is, however, one ancient belief called Vedanta, which astonishingly anticipated human evolution and its development and formulated its doctrines that are not only in consonance with the latest discoveries of science but will also be in consonance with future human aspirations and knowledge. Today science is speaking some of the Vedantic truths in its logical and forceful language. Vedanta also says: do not believe but reason it out and experience

it. Vedanta teaches us that humans are nothing but embodiments of divinity and that the world is also similarly constituted. The goal is moksha, freedom, which is attained when we can tear the veil of nature and see that our Atman is one with the infinite Brahman. All through their many vicissitudes—physical, mental, moral, social, and spiritual—humans were searching for their real nature. Evolution is really the evolution of nature and the manifestation of the Atman. Thus, just as society, humans, and religious beliefs have evolved, so have the devotees or worshippers.

Is this experience possible outside the cultural climate from which Vedanta evolved? Yes. There have been many sages and saints all over the world who have experienced this Reality. But it was in India that it was made into a systematic philosophy and religion. What is this Reality called Brahman in Vedanta? 'The wise man realizes in his heart, through samadhi, the infinite Brahman, which is something of the nature of eternal knowledge and infinite bliss, which has no exemplar, which transcends all limitations, is ever free and without activity, and which is like the limitless sky, indivisible, and absolute.'⁴ Humans built many of their institutions based on religious beliefs. Can we rebuild them on the basis of this highest experience? If we cannot, then the future generations will definitely do so, for they will be more equipped biologically, socially, and intellectually. Vedanta says that each person is the worshipper and also the worshipped. The two lines of worshipper and worshipped converge into the highest Reality. ❧

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Vivekananda and the Quest for Goodness

Dr Mohit Chakrabarti

THE GOOD ENDEAR THEMSELVES to everyone. Goodness expands the heart and mind bringing happiness and peace; it also brings good health. The more such good people live in a society, the better for that society. Vivekananda inspires us to find out the inner essence of goodness in ourselves and in everyone and to be disseminators of whatever stands for goodness.

In order to be good to others one must first be good to oneself. Secondly, to be good to oneself one must translate one's inherent Divinity into a vibrant reality. Thirdly, the realization of this Divinity in oneself calls forth the realization of it in others, despite endless points of differences.

There are five characteristics of effective and natural goodness: (i) To be good is a tremendous discipline and this should always be maintained, it is very easy to be evil but very difficult to be good; (ii) the better we become, the more goodness is tried in the most unyielding circumstances; (iii) goodness may, while interacting with others, vary according to time, place, and circumstances; (iv) challenges to goodness should be positively responded to without compromises, because generally our goodness is artificial, passive, and ornamental; (v) by remembering that goodness is a mighty force and that all inimical powers quake before it, goodness makes us supremely confident and unassailable.

The Philosophy of Being Good

As a radical visionary of goodness Vivekananda emphasizes being and doing good, but on no account one should believe that one is a 'doer'.

The idea of being an agent is a terrible bondage. We should do good for good's sake, not with a selfish purpose.

The vast majority of mankind are under this delusion; and whenever they do any good, they feel that they are [the doers]. They are not yet able to understand higher philosophy. Do not disturb their faith! They are shunning evil and doing good. Great idea! Let them have it! ... They are workers for good. By degrees they will think that there is greater glory than that of doing good. They will only witness, and things are done. ... Gradually they will understand. When they have shunned all evil and done all good, then they will begin to realise that they are all beyond all nature. They are not the doers.¹

Admittedly, to rise above all narrowness and selfishness and dedicate oneself to the goodness of all is one of the fundamental components of Vivekananda's philosophy. It enables one to be strong, brave, and upright. It also prompts one to be forgetful of the limited self and be ready for any sacrifice.

The Master [Buddha] says that selfishness is the great curse of the world; that we are selfish and that therein is the curse. There should be no motive for selfishness. You are [like a river] passing [on]—a continuous phenomenon. Have no God; have no soul; stand on your feet and do good for good's sake—neither for fear of punishment nor [for the sake of] going anywhere. Stand sane and motiveless. The motive is: I want to do good, it is good to do good. ... We are all born cowards. If we can save

ourselves [we care about nothing else]. Inside is the tremendous fear, the tremendous motive, all the time. Our own selfishness makes us the most arrant cowards; our own selfishness is the great cause of fear and cowardice. And there he stood: 'Do good because it is good; ask no more questions; that is enough. A man made to do good by a fable, a story, a superstition—he will be doing evil as soon as the opportunity comes. That man alone is good who does good for good's sake, and that is the character of the man' (3.529–30).

The re-framing of one's life by cultivating goodness, as Vivekananda reminds us, is the touchstone of excellence. Goodness is imperative for a real and worthwhile evolution of humanity. It serves as the only pathfinder, as it were, to the temple of perfection. Indeed, all unhappiness would be eliminated when we sincerely exercise the spirit of goodness. Vivekananda says:

Unhappiness is here, there, and everywhere. What does it show? That, after all, not much happiness has been gained by all these [other social] ideals. We all struggle for happiness and as soon as we get a little happiness on one side, on the other side there comes unhappiness. Shall we not work to do good then? Yes, with more zest than ever, but what this knowledge will do for us is to break down our fanaticism. ... It is the level-headed, calm, practical man who works. So, the power to work will increase from this idea. Knowing that this is the state of things, there will be more patience. The sight of misery or of evil will not be able to throw us off our balance and make us run after shadows (2.101).

To be good is to be blessed with the awakening of our inherent Divinity. Vivekananda steers us with the spirit of goodness to be able to manifest excellence in every thought, word, and deed. Purity is the bedrock of being good, and this is

the sure sign of a person's character. The spirit of goodness manifests purity and leads one to understand and appreciate everybody's inherent Divinity. We are reminded of Vivekananda's invaluable words: 'Be good, and evil will vanish for you. The whole universe will thus be changed. This is the greatest gain to society. This is the great gain to the human organism' (2.287–8).

The quest for excellence in terms of goodness is endless but thrilling, affecting, and rewarding. To do good to the world is a challenging task. How can we do good to the world? Can we really do good to the world in an absolute sense? As an incomparable and uncompromising visionary of goodness, Vivekananda remarks that this world is relative and that it has a God:

We cannot do much good to this world. Doing good to this world is very good. But can we do much good to this world? Have we done much good these hundreds of years that we have been struggling—have we increased the sum total of the happiness in the world? Thousands of means have been created every day to conduce to the happiness of the world, and this has been going on for hundreds and thousands of years. I ask you: Is the sum total of the happiness in the world today more than what it was a century ago? It cannot be. Each wave that rises in the ocean must be at the expense of a hollow somewhere. ... It is the very nature of life to be happy and miserable by turns. Then again is this world left to you to do good to it? Is there no other power working in this universe? Is God dead and gone, leaving His universe to you and me—the Eternal, the Omnipotent, the All-merciful, the Ever-awakened, the One who never sleeps when the universe is sleeping, whose eyes never blink? ...

This world is neither good nor evil. It is the Lord's world. It is beyond both good and evil, perfect in itself. His will is going on, showing all these different pictures; and it will go on without beginning and without end. It is a great

gymnasium in which you and I, and millions of souls must come and get exercises, and make ourselves strong and perfect. This is what it is for (4.205–7).

To be endowed with the spirit of goodness is to be endowed with the spirit of love. Love is the eternal fountain of all life, and God is love. True love is true goodness, and vice versa. One who wholeheartedly loves others is always blessed by God, who is all-love. Vivekananda reminds us in his poem ‘To a Friend’:

From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.’
(4.496).

The Need for Struggle

To think that the world is absolutely good and without evil is to deny the existence of goodness itself. We should accept both good and evil and continually try to orient our evil thoughts to good ones and good thoughts to better ones. The real worth and challenge comes from both good and bad thoughts, and this struggle makes us better, transparent, and pure. It is like the relation between darkness and light: darkness has to be replaced by light, and light to be illumined by more intense light till we reach perfection, which already is within the soul. Vivekananda speaks of the power of thought:

In this universe where nothing is lost, where we live in the midst of death *in life*, every thought that is thought, in public or in private, in

crowded thoroughfares or in the deep recesses of primeval forest, lives. They are continuously trying to become self-embodied, and until they have embodied themselves, they will struggle for expression, and any amount of repression cannot kill them. Nothing can be destroyed—those thoughts that caused evil in the past are also seeking embodiment, to be filtered through repeated expression and, at last, transfigured into public good (6.354).

One must have the firm conviction that the body and the mind are transitory and so is everything in the world. This conviction makes us see things in a better perspective. In reply to a disciple’s question on people’s inability to be constantly centred on the highest truths, Vivekananda said: ‘It happens like that in the initial stage, but gradually it is overcome. But from the beginning, intensity of desire in the mind is needed. Think always, “I am ever-pure, ever-knowing, and ever-free; how can I do anything evil? Can I ever be befooled like ordinary men with the insignificant charms of lust and wealth?” Strengthen the mind with such thoughts. This will surely bring real good’ (5.394).

‘You Inherited Good’

To strengthen the mind with good thoughts, good ideas, and good intentions in order to bring forth and exercise real goodness in life, as Vivekananda teaches us, is also what Lao-tzu, the great Chinese philosopher of 600 BCE traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism, has propagated. The central concept of Taoism is the Tao, way, and *te*, virtue or power. Further, ideas of the Tao-*te* are *wu-wei*, unmotivated action, and *fu*, the return of all things to their origin or source. The principles of yin and yang signify the code of behaviour that is in harmony with the natural order of the world. ‘The goal of philosophical Taoism consist in becoming one with

the Tao by realizing within oneself the universal law of the return of everything to its source (*fu*). For this the aspirant must acquire the emptiness (*wu*) and simplicity (*p'u*) of the Tao and abide in nonaction (*wu-wei*).²

In fact, when Lao-tzu speaks about simplicity, it stands for the manifestation or exercise of truth and freedom. Goodness, respect, and serenity, which are essential components of Lao-tzu's philosophy, highlight the natural and spontaneous efflorescence of human behaviour. Vivekananda also emphasizes goodness not as a forced discipline but as a spontaneous and natural outcome unalloyed by abstractions or constraints whatsoever. As he categorically observes: 'A man curses me. His curses enter my ears and are retained in my mind and body. If I am the master, I shall say: "Let these things go; they are nothing to me. I am not miserable. I do not bother." This is the outright, pure, simple, clear-cut truth.'³

As regards Vivekananda's philosophy of goodness in relation to Plato's teachings, there are some significant points that demand our attention. Indeed, Plato is greatly concerned about how to bring up children, the future citizens, in the ambience of cultivation of goodness in everything:

We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower, day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason.⁴

So far as goodness is concerned in terms of music and physical education, Plato poignantly observes: 'Gymnastics as well as music should begin in earlier years; the training in it should be careful and should continue through life. Now my belief is, not that the good body by any bodily excellence improves the soul, but, on the contrary, that the good soul, by her own excellence, improves the body as far as this may be possible' (403). Elsewhere, in delineating the role of higher education, Plato highlights the power and capacity of learning, which is inherent in the soul—a fact that Vivekananda also emphasizes. Says Plato in his famous *Allegory of the Cave*: 'Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exist in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good' (518).

The 'Form of the Good', which means the idea of being good, as Plato thinks, is the fountain of all knowledge and all being. Vivekananda also identifies goodness and knowledge within ourselves. As he significantly observes: 'All the knowledge that we have in this world, where did it come from? It was within us. What knowledge is outside? None. Knowledge was not in matter; it was in man all the time. Nobody ever created knowledge; man brings it from within.'⁵

Plato affirms that: 'Anyone who would be good at anything must practise that thing from his youth upwards, both in sport and in earnest, in its several branches.'⁶ Plato further explains the role of education for the development of the good and the beautiful in body, mind, and soul:

Now I mean by education that training which is given by suitable habits to the first instincts of virtue in children; when pleasure, and friendship, and pain, and hatred are rightly implanted in souls not yet capable of understanding the nature of them, and who find them, after they have attained reason, to be in harmony with her. This harmony of the soul, taken as a whole, is virtue; but the particular training in respect to pleasure and pain, which leads you always to hate what you ought to hate, and love what you ought to love from the beginning of life to the end, may be separated off; and, in my view, will be rightly called education (653).

Bearing in mind Plato's concept of goodness, let us turn our attention to Vivekananda, who warns us against an education sans the spirit of goodness, sans dedication and devotion to man-making and character-building: 'The education that you are getting now has some good points but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education or any training that is based on negation is worse than death.'⁷ Elsewhere Vivekananda stresses the right attitude in unfolding goodness in and through education, which produces in the learner higher thoughts and a nobler vision of life:

Negative thoughts weaken men. Do you not find that where parents are constantly taxing their sons to read and write, telling them they will never learn anything, and calling them fools and so forth, the latter do actually turn out to be so in many cases? If you speak kind words to boys and encourage them, they are bound to improve in time. What holds good of children, also holds good of children in the region of higher thoughts. If you can give them positive ideas, people will grow up to be men and learn to stand on their own legs (7.170).

The quest for goodness is actually the quest for ceaseless refinement of life through action, vision, and contemplation. It is the quest for altruism par excellence. It is also the quest for the ever-widening, ever-glorious 'manifestation of perfection already in man'. Vivekananda vibrantly asserts:

There is no station of rest; either you progress upwards or you go back and die out. The only sign of life is going outward and forward and expansion. Contraction is death. Why should you do good to others? Because that is the only condition of life; thereby you expand beyond your little self; you live and grow. All narrowness, all contraction, all selfishness is simply slow suicide, and when a nation commits the fatal mistake of contracting itself and thus cutting off all expansion and life, it must die (7.475-6).

As an ending and summarizing note, a reply of Vivekananda to the question 'why should we be good?': 'Because you inherited good. Let you in your turn leave some heritage of good to your successors. Let us all help the onward march of accumulated goodness, for goodness' sake. ... Be good and do good. If there is a God, you have Him by being good. If there is no God, being good is good' (7.429-30).



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Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

IT IS RARE IN THIS WORLD to find the right type of guru and the right type of disciple. A disciple who acts according to the guru's instructions has no enemy in this world. God ever resides with him. Some day or another he will be able to realize God.

Guru and Disciple

The *sadguru*, true guru, confers on his disciples devotion and faith. That disciple who wants wealth, reputation, and fame can never find a real guru. Those who pray for the vision of God go to a sadhu with no expectation of getting worldly happiness from him. After analysing the disciple's samskaras, tendencies, the bent of his mind, previous karmas, and the like, the guru instructs the disciple for the latter's benefit. Hence, a person should not dance at the command of just anyone and everyone. He gains nothing by that type of dancing from one side to the other. One man says one thing, a second says another; by dancing to everyone's words, one gains neither this side nor the other.

To attain [the grace of] a *sadguru* is a matter of great fortune, which requires the grace of God. If one gets the grace of a *sadguru*, one attains the true goal. One should take initiation from a renunciate.

Religion is not for everyone. Why not? How many people really want to lead the life of following the instructions under a guru's command? Everyone wants to be independent. They don't want to be subordinate.

A *sadguru* will help increase your devotion and faith in your Ishta, Chosen Ideal.

Even if a disciple has very good qualities, the guru still tries to point out the disciple's defects just as a father catches his son's defects, notwithstanding all of his good qualities. Do you know why? It is to make him free from every blemish. His sincere desire is that the disciple should advance further. That is why he points out the disciple's deficiencies.

When the understanding of non-duality arises, no sectarian feelings remain. There will be no more fights or conflicts among devotees contending: 'My guru is great! Yours is inferior!' All such conflicts only last until the non-dual understanding arises. When that knowledge comes, one sees that your guru and my guru are one. Only the form is different. Janaka said to Shukadeva: 'In the end, there will remain no question of guru or disciple. Therefore, give me my *dakshina* [gift to the guru] now before I initiate and instruct you!'

A good man may be accepted by all. I glorify those who can accept a bad man.

Vidyasagar, Keshab Sen, Vijay Goswami, and Dr Mahendranath Sarkar—all had great faith and devotion for the Master. Not one of them was illiterate; each was a scholar. They understood that something or other in him was extraordinary. That is why they revered him. Why would they revere someone who possessed no great qualities? At best they might obey such a person for a day or two, but afterwards all of their devotion and faith would run away.

It is better to be either an extreme fool or a great scholar. All complications come when one is somewhere in between. Swamiji used to say: 'It would be good if I could forget everything I have studied.' He used to argue with the Master on many subjects. In the beginning I couldn't understand. But at the end Swamiji said: 'Verily, everything he [the Master] said is true.' The Master would become extremely happy whenever Swamiji raised some doubt in argument. Again and again the Master would make him understand. He never became annoyed. The *sadguru* is like this.

A real teacher will be a little strict outside but loving inside.

You should follow the instruction of the guru with your body, mind, and speech, and you should serve the guru by begging alms for him. If he becomes pleased, by his grace one will quickly attain peace and all doubts depart in no time. My dear, is it an insignificant thing to offer service? Even God is pleased by service, what to speak of man.

Shall I remain like a puppet in your hands that I shall dance as you command me? It will not be possible for me to do that. Ah, so many people come to converse about God and listen to the Master's words! Shall I forbid them to come? I will not be able to create any obstacle to their noble desire. Today or tomorrow, the body will certainly go. Shall I give up talking about God merely to care for the body? Don't be sad. I won't be able to do that.

Sri Chaitanya was such a great renunciate—he was God himself. People worship him as an avatara. He took sannyasa from Keshab Bharati. The Master took sannyasa from Tota Puri. See, even such avatars of God have accepted someone as their guru. To accept someone as a guru is the injunction of the scriptures. Everyone should accept someone as their guru. Again, see what one-pointed love towards the guru and what

great devotion for the guru the Master had! How much respect he used to show to the guru! He could not utter the name 'Tota Puri' even by mistake. He used to call him Nangta, the naked one.

After ruling like a king for two or three lives, true renunciation arises. Many sadhus are seen to perform good spiritual practices. But after a few days, by starting a monastery or the like, they become 'somebody' as it were. Again, the guru's grace makes everything easy.

It is surely a great fortune to become the disciple of a sadhu. A person will surely receive some of the guru's qualities such as compassion and spirituality. Do you know what happens to one who loves a sadhu? He verily becomes a sadhu!

It is very difficult to be a guru in this world. The disciple offers his faith and devotion to the guru when the guru gives the mantra. But even if the guru is not that competent, there is still someone who is above him who knows everything. There is nothing beyond his knowledge! God manifests in the form of the guru in a person's heart, receives him, and directs him on his path.

Surely something bad will come of reviling a guru or a sadhu. The guru is same-sighted towards everyone—whether king or beggar. To each disciple the guru is God. Offer the guru your devotion and faith. Have no doubts about him. Oh man, obey him. Never revile him.

Being a sadhu one should not wish anyone ill. Everyone is verily his [God's] child. It is due to a lack of goodwill towards others that people experience such misery and pain. Is that guru insignificant through whom one attains God, through whom one attains peace, through whom one rests in the bliss of the Atman? People lack faith, that is why they suffer. Understand moreover: God alone is the guru. Without knowing the exact need of the disciple, if a guru directs him on the wrong path, it surely harms the disciple instead of doing good. God alone knows

everything. He can guide one along the right path. Satchidananda is the guru.

A devotee asked: 'What do you think about Sri Ramakrishna?' I said: 'He was a perfected soul, a great soul.' Not satisfied with my reply, he then asked: 'What more was he than that?' He thought I was not telling him the truth. Again he asked: 'Is he among one of the ten avatars? Or is there any mention of other avatars of God in the scriptures? Still now, I am not convinced.' Then, with a little annoyance I said: 'Why do you ask me this question? Will you believe what I tell you? You accept him with whatever feeling you have for him. You can see that I have renounced everything for him. I know there is no other refuge for me than him.'

If after receiving a mantra from a renunciate one does a little meditation and japa, it will surely bear fruit. The *kulagurus*, family gurus, also give God's mantra. There is no fault in that mantra. If one practises spiritual disciplines after receiving initiation from them, one will surely attain one's desired goal. But these people have no renunciation at all in their lives; that is why they don't develop rapidly. If one takes initiation from a sadhaka, it will quickly bring perfection. One shouldn't give up the family guru. And because they expect something, one should give them their due.

If one receives instruction in spiritual and devotional practices from anybody and everybody, it may bring harm. If one takes instruction from a guru who knows or is able to know the *bhava*, mental attitude, of the disciple, it brings great benefit. Otherwise, his *bhava* will be lost.

Maya and Avidya

Is it easy to keep one's mind on God in the midst of wealth, prestige, and splendour? Surely anything that separates us from God is maya. If one cannot cut the bonds of maya, God's grace

cannot be realized. Without spiritual and devotional practices as well as the grace of the guru, maya cannot be severed.

Maya is of two types: the bad maya and the good maya. What is bad maya? Bad maya is thinking that God is unreal and that the world is real. Through bad maya a person suffers. What is good maya? It is to realize that the world is impermanent and that God alone is real. To realize him as the very nature of Truth, to concentrate on how one may remember and reflect on him, and to think of how one may perform his worship—these types of thoughts are good maya.

A person's own maya makes him restless. Nevertheless, man wants to get entangled with another's maya. The meaning is: man is busy with his own worldly affairs, yet over and above all that, he unfairly and meaninglessly entangles himself further by poking his nose into the affairs of others.

The goal is to call upon God. But getting some honour and prestige we forget him. Such is his [God's] maya. Is there anything people won't do for honour and prestige? They print their names in the newspaper. That man is fortunate who knows that all such things are nothing, they are unreal, they are only the play of maya.

The body and the mind will surely experience pleasure and pain. Still people don't tell God about their sufferings. The three afflictions are removed from one who tells God about his sorrows.

Maya is such that it makes the real seem unreal, and the unreal seem real. All this is verily the play of maya.

Who doesn't want to be happy? How many schemes and plans people craft just to stay happy! By such scheming one will suffer—this too is a type of his maya. It is very difficult to understand God's maya.

Sri Krishna said: 'He who wants my maya will surely suffer; don't become bewildered by

my maya and forget me. He who wants me will be happy.' Sri Krishna has so many types of play. He also says: 'If you consider me to be God, you will be saved. Otherwise, you will suffer various doubts.'

I said to one of my brother-disciples: 'You have come to Kashi due to poor health. Your health is improving. Stay a few days more at the door of Vishvanath.' He said: 'Brother, in that case, the Math will not run well. Everything will become a mess.' Now, you see, he has passed away. Has the activity of the Math stopped? Does work stop for anyone? God will get his work done. If one dies, another will inevitably carry out the work. Swamiji passed away. The Math and all of its functions did not perish on account of that. It is maya to think that that will be the case.

It is good news that God has given you a son. You can pray so that, by the grace of God, your son survives. You suffer whenever you say 'mine', 'mine'. But because you have the attitude that he is God's child, even if he dies, you will not suffer. It will be a great relief if you think: 'It is you alone who gave; you alone took away. As many days as I had the chance, I served that child.' One should not have excessive attachment or maya. Such maya only brings great suffering. The one who calls upon God and has faith, devotion, and trust in God can absorb the shock.

People forget their past sufferings. That is why there is so much adversity. One doesn't feel any misery if one frequently thinks: 'What was my previous suffering and what is my present state?' Yet, if by God's grace a little advantageous situation appears, people forget everything. They immediately forget the help that others have given them. This is because they are ordinary human beings. If one remembers the condition from which one has come, one feels empathy for those remaining in such a state. But man forgets his old condition and starts condemning others. That is

why the Master used to say: 'Don't ever forget an act of benevolence; as long as you live, be grateful.'

The Master used to say that it matters little if one is rich or poor, but one should not forget the goal. People do forget. Surely that is why there is so much adversity. These things are all the play of maya.

What is the benefit of uselessly thinking about what is gone? It only destroys one's health; it does nothing more. All this trouble comes from saying, 'mine', 'mine'. One should throw all such things away. Everything is maya.

Can the Master's words be false? Maya makes the real unreal and the unreal real. If one wants to survive the hand of maya, one should remember God, whose very nature is Truth. People become monks to escape the bad maya that God has created.

Worries—either one or the other—will remain. The world is like this! No one has the luxury of a worry-free life. God doesn't allow that. Such is the impact of his maya! Sri Krishna said: 'My maya does not leave anyone; but he who takes refuge in me will be saved.'

If one goes into family life, bad desires will surely arise. You will know that the profound grace of God is upon him in whose mind these thoughts do not arise.

One must pay some tax on everything; but no one needs to pay any tax on meditation and japa. Mahamaya, the Divine Mother, has cast upon us such a maya that the desire to do meditation and japa do not arise in the mind.

We are parts of God. Is not God in you? Surely he is. You cannot see him because of the impurity of your mind and the latent mental impressions of many lives.

Dogs play together amongst themselves as if they madly love each other. But, getting a little food, they will fight and maul each other over it. Similarly, people say so many sweet words

showing so much affection for each other; but where there is a little trace of self-interest, they will not even shrink from murder! I see this to be the base nature of man! This is all the play of maya.

Sri Krishna said that the Truth appears as untruth due to the lack of spiritual practices. This is the play of maya.

Everyone thinks that things will surely remain just as they are forever. They don't understand that death is straddling their necks. Time is waiting with its open mouth. This is called maya.

My God! Seeing occult powers Mother Earth herself becomes frightened and trembles! The Master hated occult powers. But people want only that. They don't know this is maya—these things cause people to forget God.

Criticism and Slander

It is better to spend your time sleeping than to mix with people and criticize and slander others. Only those with no desire to be good act like that. They themselves have absolutely no resolve to be good nor will they let others who want to be good progress. Such and such person has done something wrong. What need is there for us to get a headache over it? And the irony of it is that the moment you slander someone, his defects come and sit on your shoulders.

Neither sadhus, devotees, nor others should be criticized or slandered. Everyone is God's own child. He loves them all. If one can similarly love God even for a day, he is extremely fortunate.

You shouldn't criticize an honest man. That is very bad. Since many people only come to visit the rich, if some wealthy man criticizes a sadhu, that criticism will cause others to be deprived of the sadhu's holy company. Now, should a rich man praise a holy man, some people will also desire to get that sadhu's holy company thinking that since a wealthy man loves him, I should also go and seek his company.

It is a great sin to see the faults of others. If one hasn't done any good action, one very easily notes the defects of others.

People who lack any decent actions can't comprehend the great qualities of a noble man. Instead, they only see his faults. Look here, Sri Krishna showed his universal form to Arjuna. Calling him God, Arjuna praised him with so many prayers and hymns. But when Sri Krishna went to negotiate with Duryodhana and Duryodhana tried to bind him, Krishna showed him his universal form as well. As Duryodhana had no faith, he thought that Sri Krishna had shown him some magic trick. On account of that, he was destroyed. Vyasa wielded his pen in such a way that even today Duryodhana is reviled.

As you understand your own suffering, you must similarly understand the suffering of others. Ordinary householders only run to find fault with others. Though you should try to alleviate the sufferings of the afflicted, instead you keep yourselves extremely busy trying to uncover their faults.

If you constantly find fault with others, only their faults will catch your attention. Never consider the faults of one from whom you have received a benefit, even if he suddenly does something improper. At such a time if you can bring his good qualities before your mind, you will escape great harm. Otherwise, at some later time, you will feel deeply repentant. Afterwards you will feel sad thinking that for a petty reason you have forgotten the help that you received from him for so many days. That is why one should never find fault with others.

It is very bad to meaninglessly doubt others. Oh my dear, it only brings harm to oneself! Also, you suffer the pain of doubting.

It is the Master's injunction that one should not listen to criticism of one's father, mother, or guru; neither should he criticize them himself.

(To be continued)

Svarajya Siddhih: Attaining Self-dominion

Gangadharendra Saraswati

Translated from Sanskrit and annotated by Swami Narasimhananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

ज्ञानं चाप्यद्वितीयस्वरससुखधनानन्तचिन्मात्ररूप-
ब्रह्मात्मैकत्वबोधः स भवति सुमतेस्तत्त्वमस्यादिवाक्यात् ।
देहाद्यध्यासदाढ्याच्छ्रुतमपि सहसा नैव संभावनीय
ब्रह्मत्वं स्वस्य तस्मान्नयगुरुवचनैः साधु मीमांसनीयम् ॥ ११ ॥

Knowledge is the understanding that the non-dual, self-contained, blissful, infinite, Brahman of the form of absolute consciousness, is one with the Atman. This understanding comes to a person of pure mind, on hearing Vedic statements like 'You are That'.⁶⁰ But this knowledge does not occur spontaneously even on hearing about one's Brahman-hood, because of the strong superimposition of body and the like. Therefore, one has to contemplate on the words of the guru who belongs to the tradition of teachers, till the knowledge of the unity of Brahman and Atman is attained.

BRAHMAN IS NON-DUAL and free from three kinds of *bhedas*, differences—*sajātīya*, intra-difference, *vijātīya*, inter-difference, and *svagata*, self-difference. *Sajātīya bheda* is the difference between two objects of the same class. For instance, an apple tree and a mango tree; both fall in the category of trees, but are different types within this category. *Vijātīya bheda* is the difference between two objects belonging to different classes, like the difference between a tree and a mountain. *Svagata bheda* is the difference between different parts or attributes of the same object, like the difference between the fruits and leaves of a tree. Brahman is

free from all such differences. It is also the essence of itself, it is self-contained. Brahman and Atman are identical. This identity is proclaimed by Upanishadic statements like 'You are That'. However, not all can understand this; only qualified aspirants with pure minds can. How does the mind become pure? By performing good actions for numerous births one attains good karmas, as a result of which good impressions are formed in the mind. Then, on hearing the Vedic statements the strongest superimposition of the body, mind, and so on is removed and the knowledge of the Atman is attained as palpably as a fruit in one's palm.

Thus, it is not the spiritual practice of one birth alone that counts. A parable of Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point:

There is a story about a man who practised the sava-sadhana. He worshipped the Divine Mother in a deep forest. First he saw many terrible visions. Finally a tiger attacked and killed him. Another man, happening to pass and seeing the approach of the tiger, had climbed a tree. Afterwards he got down and found all the arrangements for worship at hand. He performed some purifying ceremonies and seated himself on the corpse. No sooner had he done a little japa than the Divine Mother appeared before him and said: 'My child, I am very much pleased with you. Accept a boon from Me.' He bowed low at the Lotus Feet of the Goddess and said: 'May I ask You one question, Mother? I am speechless with amazement at Your action.'

The other man worked so hard to get the ingredients for Your worship and tried to propitiate You for such a long time, but You didn't condescend to show him Your favour. And I, who don't know anything of worship, who have done nothing, who have neither devotion nor knowledge nor love, and who haven't practised any austerities, am receiving so much of Your grace.' The Divine Mother said with a laugh: 'My child, you don't remember your previous births. For many births you tried to propitiate Me through austerities. As a result of those austerities all these things have come to hand, and you have been blessed with My vision. Now ask Me your boon.'⁶¹

On hearing the Vedic dictum '*Tat tvam asi*; You are That', one starts contemplating on its meaning. The word *tat* is analysed and this process is called *tat-pada shodhana*. Similarly, the word *tvam* is analysed and this process is called *tvam-pada shodhana*. After such analysis one arrives at the truth that both *tat* and *tvam* refer to Brahman alone. However, this can happen only if the aspirant is endowed with the qualifying attributes of dispassion, discernment, control of the mind and the senses, and desire for liberation. The aspirant should also possess a refined intellect, as said in the Upanishads: 'He [the Purusha] is hidden in all beings, and hence he does not appear as the Atman of all. But by the seers of subtle things, he is seen through a pointed and fine intellect.'⁶² Those of dull or mediocre intellect cannot fathom Brahman even after hearing the Vedic dicta, just like a person unfamiliar with a diamond considers it to be merely a piece of glass.

Objection: What is the need of having a fine intellect to understand the import of simple Vedic statements like 'You are That'? Do not people with ordinary intellects understand the meanings of sentences used in day-to-day affairs?

Reply: A fine intellect is indeed necessary. Those who have merely listened to Vedic dicta

without the realization of Brahman do indulge in worldly activities and are subject to the dualities of happiness and misery, and the like. Acharya Shankara says in his commentary on the fourth sutra of the *Brahma Sutra*: 'It is seen that even in the case of one who has heard of Brahman, such characteristics of a soul in bondage as happiness, sorrow, etc. persist just as before.'⁶³ Hence, a fine intellect is necessary for contemplation on the Vedic dicta taught by the guru.

There are three kinds of obstacles to the knowledge of the unity of Brahman and Atman. The first is *samśaya bhāvana*, doubt in general. The student who hears Vedic statements like 'You are That' doubts the scriptures, the guru, the spiritual disciplines taught, and so on. This is a general kind of doubt characteristic of scepticism. In modern times this doubt or suspicion was brought about into society at large mainly by three schools of thought: Marxism, Freudian psychology, and Nihilism. They embody all that has characterized suspicion regarding the higher nature of the human being. Paul Ricoeur famously called the exponents of these the 'school of suspicion'; he says: 'Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. It is easier to show their common opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred, understood as a propaedeutic to the "revelation" of meaning, than their interrelationship within a single method of demystification.'⁶⁴

This general suspicion or doubt can be removed only by faith in the scriptures and the guru, brought about by logical cogitation. This faith is called *shraddha* and it is one of the basic qualifications required of a spiritual aspirant. Swami Vivekananda extols *shraddha*:

What makes the difference between man and man is the difference in this Shraddha and nothing else. What makes one man great and another weak and low is this Shraddha. ... This Shraddha

must enter into you. ... This Shraddha is what I want, and what all of us here want, this faith in ourselves, and before you is the great task to get that faith. Give up the awful disease that is creeping into our national blood, that idea of ridiculing everything, that loss of seriousness. Give that up. Be strong and have this Shraddha, and everything else is bound to follow.⁶⁵

The second obstacle is *asambhāvana*, the notion of impossibility. On hearing the Vedic dicta, it seems impossible that the Atman could be Brahman. It sounds more like a fantasy. Vedanta proclaims that one's true nature is Brahman, which is free from hunger and thirst, not limited by differences like caste, is self-evident, eternal, having the nature of absolute existence-knowledge-bliss. However, an ordinary person directly experiences feelings like hunger and thirst, is proud of special parentage, experiences the dualities of happiness and misery, and is bound by the fruits of actions. Under such circumstances one is unable to say that this manifested world is an illusion, because this world is the object of the experience of all people, and also this beginningless world does not seem to have any end. Further, all sense objects are perceived and evaluated through sense organs like the eye and so on. Since the world is perceived and evaluated, there seems to be no defect in it; it is difficult to accept its ephemeral nature. Even the rituals prescribed in the Vedas are performed with the help of the sense organs and are very much within the realm of this dualistic world. This obstacle of *asambhāvana* is removed by *manana*, contemplation, on the Vedic dicta.

The third obstacle to the realization of the unity of Atman and Brahman is *viparīta-bhāvana*, the notion of contradiction. We always see this manifested world and the idea that the empirical world is the true reality is deep-rooted in our minds. How can we negate this universe all of a sudden? The impressions of many births are

very strong and exert their pull again and again upon us making us run after sense enjoyments. And so, the ephemeral world does not seem so ephemeral, rather it seems very permanent. Day after day we deal with sense objects; how can we negate their existence? This is *viparīta-bhāvana*. It is through *nidhidhyāsa*, constant meditation, that this obstacle can be removed.

It is not possible to comprehend Brahman through the senses, as it cannot be known by the ordinary methods of knowledge, but through the Upanishads. However, even the hearing of the teachings of the scriptures and the guru, who deny duality, does not lead to the knowledge of the non-dual Brahman because such knowledge goes beyond the very scriptures, which speak about it. If something that is dependent upon another thing is posited to go against the very entity it depends upon, it is called the error of *upajīvyā virodhaḥ*. The methods of knowledge, the scriptures including the Upanishads, and the guru are all within the realm of duality, but Brahman is non-dual. This would lead to the conclusion that the knowledge of Brahman suffers from the error of *upajīvyā virodhaḥ*. If the Vedas are held to be valid, even if they go against what is known by methods of knowledge like direct perception, then in statements like 'the sacrificial post is the sun', 'the person performing the sacrifice is a bundle of *durvha* grass', the implied meaning cannot be taken and the absurd verbatim meaning will have to be taken as the real meaning of the sentence. In practice, the implied meanings of these sentences are construed as their true import and they are held to mean 'the sacrificial post is as bright as the sun' and 'a bundle of *durvha* grass can represent the person performing the sacrifice'. If these implied meanings are not considered, these statements will be absurd. Also, all knowledge that cannot be obtained through methods like direct perception should be considered

invalid. This is not logical or proper. That is why Vedanta holds that the methods of knowledge used for satisfying one's desires do not lead to the knowledge of Brahman, and it is not possible to negate this manifested universe all of a sudden.

Thus, it has been established that due to this difficulty to know Brahman it cannot be known even if its knowledge is taught a hundred times. It can be known only after contemplation and meditation for a long time. Those who do not understand this and yet think they can understand Brahman are not only fools themselves but also delude others and uselessly talk about Vedanta. Their plight is as spoken of in the Upanishads: 'Living in the midst of ignorance and considering themselves intelligent and enlightened, the senseless people go round and round, following crooked courses, just like the blind led by the blind.'⁶⁶ Others who suffer from suspicion wander aimlessly like shipwrecked persons floating without direction in the sea. Thus, it has been spoken by the wise: 'The yoga that is familiarly referred to as *asparśa*, contactless, is difficult to be comprehended by anyone of the yogis. For those yogis, who apprehend fear where there is no fear, are afraid of it.'⁶⁷

Even persons who are desirous of liberation and have given up all actions are unable to attain to the knowledge of Brahman due to obstacles like *samsāya-bhāvana*. It is for the help of such aspirants that the sage Badarayana has, out of his infinite mercy, written the analytic work *Brahma Sutra*. Using the logic depicted therein and also following the teachings of the scriptures and the guru, one has to constantly contemplate and cogitate on the Vedic dicta till one attains the knowledge of the unity of the Atman and Brahman. On such contemplation and meditation the knowledge of Brahman dawns either in this birth or in the next birth. The certainty of such knowledge is proclaimed: 'He understood

that from him. He understood that from him.'⁶⁸

The hearing of the Vedic dicta can lead to the realization of Brahman in the next birth, if not in the present birth. This knowledge can come at any stage of the transmigratory cycle of births and deaths. It can also occur while one is in the mother's womb, as evidenced in the case of Vamadeva: "Even while lying in the womb, I came to know of the birth of all the gods. A hundred iron citadels held me down. Then, like a hawk, I forced my way through by dint of the knowledge of the Self." Vamadeva said this while still lying in the mother's womb.'⁶⁹ One can attain the knowledge of Brahman even in this very life if one properly follows the path mentioned in the Upanishads and does diligent contemplation and meditation on the Vedic dicta. That is why it is taught in the *Brahma Sutra*: 'The generation of knowledge takes place even in this life if there is no obstruction to the means adopted. For this is what is revealed (by the Upanishads).'⁷⁰

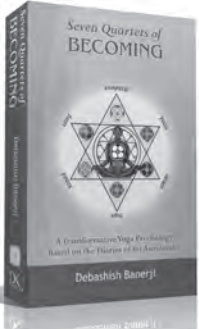
(To be continued)

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
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Seven Quartets of Becoming: A Transformational Yoga Psychology Based on the Diaries of Sri Aurobindo

Debashish Banerji

D K Printworld, 'Vedasri', F-395 Sudarshan Park, New Delhi 110 015.
Website: www.dkprintworld.com.
2012. xiii + 441 pp. ₹ 580.

Swami Vivekananda had posited a spiritual victory at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893. It resulted in breaking many barriers dividing the East and the West. The principles of Vedanta became current among the intelligentsia and the cultured, while yoga became a pathway to attaining the Vedantic ideal.

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) returned to India in 1893 after spending fourteen years as a student in England. He had received a complete Western education and became an English teacher in the Maharaja's College, Baroda. Poet, scholar, and patriot he was also deeply attracted by the Vedic religion. Those were times when India was agog with Swami Vivekananda's triumph at Chicago, and his subsequent lectures on Vedanta and yoga were drawing an increasing number of people.

According to his brother Barindra, Sri Aurobindo turned to yoga after the convention of the Indian National Congress at Surat in 1907. He took lessons in meditation from a yogi named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Sri Aurobindo gained immense peace from yoga. He was arrested in April 1908 and was put in the Alipore Jail, Calcutta. During his year-long trial for 'waging a war against the King', he remained unflappable, continued with his yoga, and studied the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita. He had a recurring vision of Swami Vivekananda that gave him hints on how to move forward in yoga.

Though acquitted and released in 1909, Sri

Aurobindo, who was then at the apex of his political career, preferred to withdraw completely to Pondicherry and continue with his practice of yoga. He set down in detail his experiences as he went deeper into meditation. He formulated his aims under seven headings: The base was to be formed by a perfection of (i) *shanta*, peace; (ii) *shakti*, power; (iii) *vijnana*, knowledge; and (iv) *sharira*, body, which were to be approached by (v) *brahma*, a perfection of being; (vi) *karma*, action; and (vii) *siddhi*, integral perfection. Under each of these seven headings there are four steps.

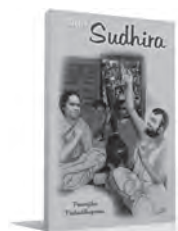
Yoga is certainly not mathematics, and Sri Aurobindo knew that; what he was actually trying to understand were the great achievements of the rishis by undergoing the yoga processes himself. With his mastery of Western philosophical thought and his in-depth studies of Sanskrit texts, the crystallization of his yoga as a systematic plan is indeed a helpful guide. Debashish Banerji says that Sri Aurobindo 'received' this programme as *saptha chatusthaya*, seven quartets, and that 'in November 1913 he noted down this scheme of the seven quartets on some loose sheets and began elaborating on them, a process which remained incomplete' (3). These elaborations of Sri Aurobindo are to be found in the diaries and notebooks now published as *The Record of Yoga*.

Studying this work in the background of Eastern and Western philosophy and Sri Aurobindo's other writings, Debashish Banerji has written a reliable guide to Sri Aurobindo's yoga, where psychology plays an integral part. While all the other six facets are plausible to contemplate, it is the body—matter—that defies the philosopher and the sadhaka. Can there be physical immortality? Is the body no more than an expendable appendage to the soul? Or, can there be 'a divine life in a divine body' (221)? Can there be an eternal regeneration of cells for a particular body? Can one get at the 'psycho-material processes' (223),

resulting in physical immortality? Pondicherry, where Sri Aurobindo went deep into the yogic processes, is famed for its siddha yoga tradition, which speaks highly of *kayakalpa*, physical regeneration. Perhaps cell transformation directed by one's consciousness was possible 'through the conscious choice of cell division mediated by the natural divine property of eternity being brought into the physical cells as a dynamic consciousness determining its activities' (233). Quite a possibility, but obviously the way is long and stretches into the far future. Meanwhile it is good to have *Seven Quartets of Becoming*, which takes us into the very centre of Sri Aurobindo's yogic work, a divine laboratory to understand the pulsating energy around us and within us as well.

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Sister Sudhira

Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana

Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Kolkata 700 076. Website: www.srisaradamath.org. 2012. 96 pp. ₹ 25.

The world sometimes sees a remarkable soul that breaks its monotonous drabness and insipidity and inspires people to live a higher life. One such soul was Sister Sudhira, who was blessed to come in close touch with the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Sister Sudhira was one of the pioneers, besides Sisters Nivedita and Christine, who steered the movement started by Swami Vivekananda for the education and emancipation of Indian women.

As a young girl Sudhira dreamt that she was sitting in a room with Sri Ramakrishna surrounded by other people. Looking at Sudhira Sri Ramakrishna asked: "Will you do something for me?" She agreed at once. Then he said, "Go outside this door" (20). She opened it to find the world's suffering and she felt they were *her* people. Thus her life's goal was decided and she rose up to her mission. She had great charisma, leadership qualities, and total dedication to her work. The source of energy and inspiration was Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. One is amazed to read how the

Holy Mother prayed for Sudhira's fresh lease of life when Sudhira was seriously ill with very little chance of recovery at the age of twenty two. Her life was extended by another ten years, and within this short span she sacrificed herself completely for the education of women and for the fledgling women's Math.

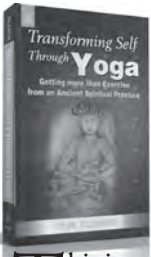
She was an educationist, a freedom fighter, and a spiritual leader. Her elder brother was Swami Prajnananda, Devavrata Maharaj, editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* and president of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati. In his youth, he was arrested and jailed, along with Sri Aurobindo, in the famous Alipore Bomb Case. Her brother inculcated in his sister a revolutionary spirit and guided her to develop a fiery personality.

She was only sixteen or seventeen when she first came to teach at Nivedita Girls' School at Baghbazar, Calcutta. Before she came to the school the spirit of dispassion was present in her and she had also wandered about dressed as a *sannyasini*. She built a small place in the school that served as an ashrama. She encouraged the school girls to be hardworking, courageous, and independent. She was also instrumental in encouraging Sarala, Pravrajika Bharatiprana, who later became the first president of Sri Sarada Math, to escape from home, renounce worldly life, and become a *sannyasini*.

Sudhira's dependence on God was complete, as she was constantly aware of God's power protecting her. She passed away at thirty-two, after she fell from the train that was taking her to Varanasi. When Swami Saradananda heard of her demise, he said: 'It happened as it did because she suddenly had a vision of her Chosen Ideal and was unable to keep herself steady' (93). He later wrote in the *Udbodhan*: 'What she accomplished in her short life, a person of seventy could not. The thousand-petal lotus had blossomed by the grace of her guru' (94). Her guru was none other than Sri Sarada Devi.

This book provides a great inspiration, and one finds many lesser-known but important incidents of the early history of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Bishan Basu
New Delhi



Transforming Self through Yoga

Tom Pilarzyk

New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Industrial Area, Phase I, New Delhi 110 028.
Website: www.newagebooksindia.com.
2011. xvii + 269 pp. ₹ 295.

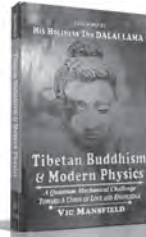
This interesting book shows how the US, from being the land of *bhoga*, enjoyment, is turning into the land where yoga is widely practised. As yoga is becoming part of US culture, a nation that economically and culturally is influencing much of the world, we are seeing yoga's worldwide proliferation.

That there exists at present a number of yoga studios going packed in even small US cities and towns shows a remarkable trend. The east and west coasts of the US were the areas where yoga first spread and has now reached the centre of the country, which is filled with traditional Christians. This also speaks much about how yoga has transformed lifestyles. The author says that 'an estimated sixteen million people currently practice [yoga] and spend roughly six billion dollars annually on classes, products, and services [related to yoga], according to a 2008 Harris Interactive poll' (1).

The book has the subtitle: 'Getting more than Exercise from an Ancient Spiritual Practice.' This is how the wind of yoga is now blowing after the initial attraction for health and wealth, which was a preparatory stage. US citizens are now embarking on the scientific, mystical, and metaphysical search of the yoga philosophy.

Transforming Self through Yoga is a thorough study by an author who has devoted more than two decades to yoga and meditation. What the author also shows is how Americans have transformed yoga, due to modern needs, in a host of ways. He shows various views on yoga and teaching methods specifically designed for Americans—this is the creative aspect of the American mind. The author intermittently relates interesting stories of people who were transformed through yoga. Such a style, plus the author's hands-on experiences, make the book an appealing read.

PB



Tibetan Buddhism & Modern Physics: A Quantum Mechanical Challenge

Vic Mansfield

New Age Books. 2011. xii + 180 pp.
₹ 225.

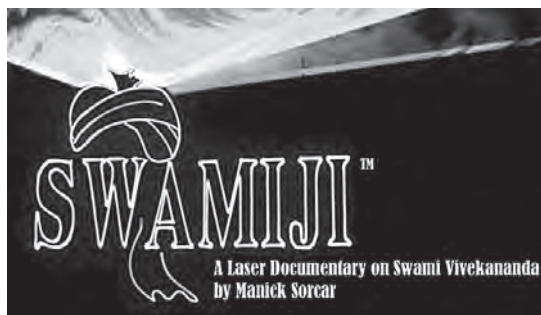
What happens when professional scientists and professors become interested in Eastern spirituality? They try to find the correlations between these two grand fields of human endeavour—after the initial difficulty of technical terms are eliminated. Such people invariably find a lot of similarities, not because they are subconsciously looking for patterns but because after a lot of objective studies they discover that these correlations do exist.

The search for such correlations starts when one wants to solve personal existential doubts. But as personal doubts are settled and convictions set in, one becomes amazed at the deeply intuitive feeling regarding the union of science and Eastern philosophies. One then feels inspired to translate the findings of the two fields and their convictions. This is what happened to Vic Mansfield, who is a professor of physics and also teaches aspects of Tibetan Buddhism and Jungian psychology. The spiritual side of the author's journey is backed by nearly four decades of spirituality practised in India and the US.

Tibetan Buddhism and its psychology, which has its roots in the great ancient university of Nalanda, is now, thanks to experts, spreading all over the world. Like the author, these experts are well trained and find greater insights in the conclusions of modern physics. This commingling of science and philosophy has enriched their inner lives both spiritually and intellectually. Through such efforts the antagonism between religion and science, between East and West, is slowly being breached. By showing that both quantum mechanics and Tibetan Buddhism are not contradictory, a new phase of thinking opens up to the world, as the subtitle indicates, 'Towards a Union of Love and Knowledge'. The book carries a wonderful foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

PB

REPORTS



Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Bengaluru:** Vivekananda retreat for 200 children of an orphanage on 2 October 2012. **Baranagar Mission:** State-level cultural competitions from 25 to 28 October, in which 127 students from all the 19 districts of West Bengal participated. Value education programmes in 4 schools and 1 college in the month of October; 1,077 students attended the programmes. **Bhubaneswar:** Talks on Swamiji at the ashrama on 29 and 30 September, attended by about 325 persons on each day. Meetings, cultural competitions, processions, and cultural programmes in 26 schools and 13 colleges in 8 districts of Odisha from 21 August to 18 October, attended by about 11,000 students. A talk on Swamiji on 11 October, attended by 25 senior agriculture officers, professors, and others. **Chandigarh:** 12 programmes in different educational institutions in and around Chandigarh, in which altogether 1,435 students took part. Discourses, exhibition, distribution of literature, and other activities formed part of the programmes. **Colombo (Sri Lanka):** Lectures and a seminar in September, attended by about 800 people. **Delhi:** A digital learning centre with interactive smart boards was inaugurated on 12 October. The facility is being extended to the poor students of the coaching centre of the ashrama. The ashrama held the first two rounds of its All India Online Gen-Next Leadership Contest for youths from 1 June to 31 August and 15 September to 15 October, in

which nearly 27,000 students from about 4,500 institutions spanning the entire country participated. 'Harmony through Music', a programme of Sufi music by a renowned Sufi singer, was conducted on 28 October. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** Elocution and essay competitions in Sanskrit on 5 September, in which 22 and 25 candidates respectively took part. A national seminar on 'Spirituality and Positive Psychology' on 29 and 30 September, in which 8 papers were presented in the academic sessions and 7 speeches were delivered in the inaugural and valedictory sessions. The Institute held a programme at Science City, Kolkata, on 10 October, in which Kumari Selja, Union Minister of Culture, inaugurated a laser documentary on Swamiji made by Sri Manick Sorcar, a renowned laserist of the USA. **Kanchipuram:** Talks on Swamiji in 3 colleges in the month of October, attended by nearly 1,250 students and 50 teachers. **Kochi:** Youth camps on 6 and 27 October, in which about 200 youths took part. **Lucknow:** An interfaith conference on 11 September, attended by about 400 people. **New York Vedanta Society (USA):** A music programme on the premises of the Society on 28 October. **Ootacamund:** The centre conducted the following programmes in collaboration with **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore:** (i) cultural competitions and speeches at a school in Agalar, Nilgiris District, on 12 October; (ii) procession, public meeting, and devotional music at Adigaratty village, Nilgiris District, on 17 October; (iii) cultural competitions, public meeting,

film show, and cultural programmes at Aranakadu, Nilgiris District, on 21 October. About 3,600 people, including 1,000 students, participated in the programmes. **Palai:** Cultural competitions, in which 210 students from 8 schools and 3 colleges took part. **Ponnampet:** In collaboration with Karnataka Kodava Sahitya Academy, Madikeri, the centre organized Kodava Music Festival on 5 and 6 October, in which many artistes participated. Music competitions were held in five categories for different age groups. About 2,800 people attended the programmes. **Pune:** A residential camp for 50 rural youths on 6 and 7 October. A workshop for 110 B.Ed. students on 13 October. Japa Yajna on 14 October, in which 127 devotees participated. **Ranchi Sanatorium:** A hockey tournament on 2 October, in which 16 teams from 16 villages around Ranchi participated. **Salem:** Value education programmes in two colleges from 3 to 6 October, in which 400 students took part. Talk on Swamiji at a school in Valayapatti, Namakkal district, on 5 October, attended by 1,150 students and teachers. **Sargachhi:** A cycle rally from Sargachhi ashrama to Swamiji's Ancestral House from 14 October morning to 15 October evening, in which 150 rural youths participated as cyclists; 11 motor cycles and 2 decorated vehicles accompanied the rally. **Sarisha:** Cultural competitions in September, in which 339 students of 38 schools took part. **Sikra-Kul Ingram:** Spiritual retreat on 2 October, in which nearly 400 devotees took part. **Silchar:** Youth conventions on 12 and 13 October, in which 635 students participated; and a spiritual retreat on 14 October, in which 580 devotees took part. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** At the initiative of the centre seven institutions in Kolkata organized talks on Swamiji in October, attended by nearly 3,200 people. **Thiruvananthapuram:** Sri Hansraj Bhardwaj, governor of Kerala, performed Bhumi Puja for the proposed statue of

Swamiji at Kowdiar Park, Thiruvananthapuram, to be installed by the ashrama. **Vadodara:** Talks on Swamiji at 11 educational institutions in various parts of Gujarat, attended by about 2,900 students. Three youth conventions, one each in three cities of Gujarat, in which nearly 900 youths took part.

Headquarters

Durga Puja was celebrated at Belur Math from 21 to 24 October with due solemnity and joy. About two lakh devotees attended the Puja. The Kumari Puja performed on 22 October drew huge crowds, and the Sandhi Puja on that evening was also attended by many devotees. Sri M K Narayanan, governor of West Bengal, attended the Kumari Puja on Ashtami day. Doordarshan Kolkata telecast live the Puja at different times on all the days, and the entire celebration was streamed live on Belur Math website. Cooked Prasad was served to about 52,000 devotees on Ashtami day and to more than one lakh devotees during the four days.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly installed lift at the headquarters office on 7 October and laid the foundation stone for the proposed extension to Girish Memorial Building (President Maharaj's quarters) at Belur Math on 9 October, the birthday of Swami Abhedananda.

News from Branch Centres

Durga Puja, in image, was celebrated at Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar (under Agartala), Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Karimganj, Lucknow, Malda, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella (under Cherrapunji), Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama in India, and outside India in Mauritius and at 11 centres in Bangladesh: Baliati, Barisal,

Chittagong, Comilla, Dhaka, Dinajpur, Faridpur, Habiganj, Jessore, Narayanganj and Sylhet.

The circulation of *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam*, the Tamil monthly published by **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, has crossed 150,000 copies per month. To mark this occasion, a function was held at Erode on 23 September, which was attended by about 3,500 persons.

The annual convocation of **Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur**, for the faculties of Disability Management and Special Education (DMSE) and General & Adapted Physical Education and Yoga (GAPEdY) was held at the University's Faculty Centre at **Coimbatore** on 5 October, in which 156 and 131 successful candidates respectively of the above faculties were awarded certificates and degrees from diploma to doctoral levels. Sri V V Bhat, Member, Atomic Energy Commission, Space Commission and Earth Commission, delivered the convocation address. The convocation of the Integrated Rural & Tribal Development and Management (IRTDM) was held at the university's faculty centre located at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Morabadi, Ranchi**, on 15 October. Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, who is also the chancellor of the university, presided over the function and awarded the degrees to eight candidates of M.Sc. in IRTDM and nine candidates of B.Sc. in IRTDM. Dr S Ayappan, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, and Secretary, Department of Agricultural Research and Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, was the guest-in-chief and delivered the convocation address. On this occasion Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the newly constructed four-storey building for the IRTDM faculty. He also unveiled and dedicated an eleven-foot bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda installed in front of the new building.


Achievements

Argha Ghosh and Animesh Lahiri, a team of two students of the Vidyamandira College at **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur**, won the first prize—comprising a trophy and 25,000 rupees—at the West Bengal State Student-Youth Fair 2012 competition held by the Youth Services Department, Government of West Bengal, in collaboration with Birla Industrial and the Technological Museum, Kolkata, from 2 to 4 August.

The State Council of Education and Research Training, Assam, conducted a state level competition in science exhibits on various themes from 3 to 5 September. Each team consisted of two students. Among the two teams that stood first on the themes 'Conservation of Medicinal Plants and Its Use' and 'Air Pollution and Its Control', three of them—Anupam Rabha, Sanjeev Rabha and Journal Rabha—were from the students' home at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati**.

Relief

Drought Relief • **Malda** centre distributed 600 kg rice, 100 kg pulses, 600 kg potatoes, 100 kg mustard oil, 40 kg milk powder, 100 kg sugar, and 200 saris among 200 drought-affected families belonging to 3 villages of Habibpur block in Malda district.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people: **Baranagar Math**: 490 saris, 25 dhotis, and 245 children's garments on 15 October; **Belgharia**: 1,437 shirts, 1,124 pants, 500 dhotis, 430 lungis, 1,039 saris, 231 sets of salwar kameez, 473 frocks, 133 woolen garments, and 580 blankets among 1,015 poor families from June to October; **Cherrapunjee**: 500 saris from 14 to 30 October; **Jalpaiguri**: 300 saris, 50 dhotis, and 150 children's garments on 14 October; **Karimganj**: 200 saris and 81 dhotis in October; **Malda**: 110 saris, 90 dhotis, and 400 children's garments; **Vrindaban**: 1,425 kg rice, 1,425 kg wheat flour, 450 kg pulses, 325 kg mustard oil, 400 kg salt, and 162 kg sugar among 525 poor widows in Vrindaban on 15 October. 



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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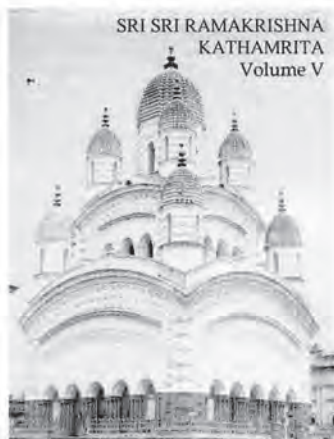
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